

Be Fruitful and Multiply!

Israel and Its Growing Minorities

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Since Israel was founded in 1948, it has defined itself simultaneously as both a Jewish and a democratic state. It is home to secular as well as ultra-Orthodox Jews, Muslims, Christians and Druze. However, due to diverging growth rates in the different populations, domestic and religious tensions have been developing which could undermine the secular and Zionist founding ethos of the Jewish State.

Introduction

When President Reuven Rivlin focused on demographic developments in Israel in his speech at the Herzliya conference on security policy last year, he must have been aware that his words might spark public debate.¹ After all, demography is far more than the subject of a socio-political debate in Israel: it entails a threat to the Jewish State's spiritual foundations.

Since the state of Israel was founded in 1948, the composition of its society has been a continuous subject of political discourse. The most recent statistics for the Holy Land, i.e. for Israel plus the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, show that the birth rate of the Arab population far surpasses that of the Jewish population. Opinion-makers and political decision-makers have concluded that this constitutes a "danger from within". They believe that if Israel is not capable of retaining its demographic Jewish majority by "biological" means and by purposeful Jewish immigration as well as a successful "fertility policy", the nation will literally become "overpopulated" by the Arabs. In deliberations in the aftermath of the failed Camp David summit in 2000, former Israeli defence minister Ehud Barak described the demographic issue as an "existential threat".² Palestinian President Arafat even predicted a "war of the womb" back in the 1990s.³

Rivlin did not, however, follow this line of thought in his speech. Instead, he spoke about the social repercussions of the demographic developments in the different ethnic and religious

groupings within Israeli society. He stated that the vastly diverging birth rates and the partly very different lifestyles would result in increasing fragmentation and alienation, a development that was particularly noticeable within the Jewish population. According to Rivlin, the rapid growth of the ultra-Orthodox community in particular and of the Arab minority would pose new challenges to society with respect to its "Israeli-ness", i.e. its Israeli identity.

Many Israelis share Rivlin's concerns: they fear that Israel will change in its very foundations. One of the crucial factors will be the rise in the numbers of ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel. The identity and character of the Jewish State is influenced by the steadily increasing proportion of Arab Israelis, who tend to find it difficult to integrate into society and who historically do not feel as beholden to the Zionist concept as their Jewish fellow citizens. One can already observe the demographic shifts affecting the course of politics. This could result in a reorientation, which would also determine the future of the peace process with the Palestinians. In view of the demographic changes, the claim to be both a Jewish and a democratic state that offers a home to all its citizens, whatever their religion and origin, further entails one of the greatest challenges for the small country.

The Current Demographic Situation

At currently 8.6 million, Israel's population has increased more than tenfold since it was founded almost 70 years ago. The reasons for the rapid growth are obvious. Besides an active

immigration policy aimed at attracting Jews from the diaspora, there has been a constant steep population growth within the country. In no other Western country is the average birth rate as high as in Israel. With three children per woman, the small country, which covers an area roughly the size of Hesse, holds the leading position in the OECD statistics, where the average for the member states is a mere 1.7. Thanks to excellent healthcare, Israel currently also has one of the lowest infant mortality rates in the world. According to the latest figures from the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, three-quarters of the 8.6 million Israelis are Jewish and a further 17.5 per cent are Muslim. Druze, Christians and members of non-monotheist faiths make up a small minority of 7.5 per cent of the population.

However, the highest birth rate is found among the Israelis living permanently beyond the

“Green Line”: the Jewish settlers on the West Bank. Their enormous growth rate of 4.1 per cent is based above all on their high birth rate that is as ever complemented by the arrival of further settler families.⁴

A study by the Jerusalem-based demographer Sergio Della Pergola forecasts that the number of inhabitants will continue to rise significantly over the next few decades.⁵ According to official figures, the Israeli population is set to increase by almost three million by 2035.⁶ According to Della Pergola, new immigrants will account for less than ten per cent of that number, with the remainder arising from “natural growth”.

The Ideal of the Large Family

The unusually high birth rate for a Westernized country reflects the ideal of the large family that is deeply ingrained in Jewish culture. The



Crumbling unity: Also with a view to the Middle East conflict, the rapid rise of ultra-Orthodox Jews and Arab Israelis puts the Jewish state under pressure. [Source: © Amir Cohen, Reuters.](#)

spiritual significance of fertility is underscored by the biblical edict “Be fruitful and multiply” which is also the very first of the over six hundred commandments in the Torah. An abundance of children can also be attributed to a psychological aspect. Hundreds of years of persecution and numerous anti-Semitic pogroms in the diaspora communities have left their scars; because of the Shoah and the extermination of large parts of the European Jewish population, the trauma of the threat of the annihilation of the Jewry has become part of Jewish identity. Official family policy is also a contributory factor not to be underestimated in fostering large families. Besides generous benefit packages, which not only cover most of the cost of pregnancy check-ups including prenatal diagnostics, extensive genetic testing as well as generously subsidised fertility treatment for men and women, future parents also receive active support with their family planning. Women’s universal right to motherhood has been recognised by rulings of the Israeli Supreme Court; arranging surrogacies is generally permitted, contrary to the situation in many countries in Western Europe.

Immigration as a Zionist Ideal

Besides the birth rate, the second mainstay of the demographic development is immigration, which – due to Israel’s self-definition as a Jewish state – is almost exclusively reserved to those who can prove Jewish ancestry. Accounting for just under a fifth⁷ of total population growth, the Jews who have decided to immigrate to “the promised land” from the diaspora, making *aliyah* (literally “ascent”), contribute significantly to the country’s demographic development.

The Policy Guidelines published by the current government display the significant role purposeful immigration policy plays in maintaining the political status quo, i.e. preserving Israel as a Jewish state by maintaining a Jewish majority population. Here, the fifth of a total of ten guidelines says: “The Government will place the issue of immigration and immigrant

absorption at the top of its list of priorities and will work vigorously to increase immigration from all countries of the world”.⁸ The great significance is also reflected by the existence of a separate “Ministry of Immigrant Absorption”. In 2015, this government department, headed by Russian-born Minister Sofa Landver, was allocated roughly the same budget as the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁹ The department does not only offer generous financial support to eligible new immigrants (*olim*, individuals who are Jewish or have a recognised right of return), but also fosters integration through free language courses, educational measures and consulting services for business start-ups.

Immigration of persons of Jewish descent is one of Israel’s declared policy aims.

The cultural significance of *aliyah* already comes across in the terminology: referring to immigration literally as “ascent” epitomizes Israel’s elevated position as the chosen homeland in contrast to the diaspora community, whereas emigration is referred to by the Hebrew term *yeridah* (“descent”), which has a negative, almost derisive connotation.

Deep Religiosity Combined with Large Families

Besides the remarkable number of over three children per woman, the distribution of the children between the different groupings within Israeli society is even more decisive for the country’s future than the overall “biological” growth. According to statistics, every mother who describes her lifestyle as secular has on average 2.1 children. It is a totally different picture for the ultra-Orthodox families (*Haredim*, which translates as “god-fearing”). The *Haredim* embody the strictest interpretation of the Jewish faith. They do not, in fact, form a homogeneous group, but represent a mosaic of different communities, which generally follow a rabbi as the authority figure. Their everyday lives are

characterised by strict adherence to biblical and rabbinic laws, and their contact with other groups of society is frequently very limited due to separate education systems and residential areas.

Altogether, the average birth rate among the Haredi community is currently around 6.5 children per woman. However, there have been some indications of a trend towards “smaller” families over the last few years. Just three years ago, an ultra-Orthodox woman even had more than seven children on average. While the overall number of *Haredim* at Israel’s inception is estimated to have been approximately 30,000, their share in the population has increased at an enormous rate since then. At some 830,000 members, the community now makes up over ten per cent of Israel’s total population. Many demographers agree in their estimates that their number is set to increase to as many as more than two million in the next 20 years.

The Growing Minority of Arab Israelis

The current number of Israeli citizens from an Arab background living in Israel (not including the Golan Heights and East Jerusalem) is estimated at approximately 1.4 million, accounting for just under a fifth of the close to eight million inhabitants. Over two-thirds of them describe themselves as Sunnis. Comprising a little more than quarter of a million, the Bedouin make up the second-largest group of Arab Israelis. The formerly nomadic desert people, which is Sunni as well, consists of 30 different tribes and lives mainly in the Negev. Besides these two groups, Israel’s Arab population includes approximately 120,000 Christians and roughly the same number of Druze. The average birth rate among Arab Israelis lies somewhere between those of their secular and ultra-religious Jewish compatriots and is higher for Muslim Arabs than for Christians and Druze.

Within the group of Arab Israelis, it is worth taking a closer look in particular at the Bedouin. At 6.8 children per family, they figure far above the overall Israeli average. Should this birth rate

continue unaltered, the number of Bedouin in Israel will have risen to half a million by 2035 according to a forecast provided by the Israeli Minister of Agriculture Yair Shmair in 2014.¹⁰ One of the main reasons for the large numbers of children has to do with the Bedouin’s polygamous lifestyle. As a relic from the era of the British Mandate, the Bedouins are still granted certain privileges; polygamy, for instance, which is traditional among Bedouins, is tolerated while it is illegal elsewhere in Israel. This legal tolerance has come under strong public pressure for some years now. Firstly, because it is not compatible with the democratic values of the state, and secondly, because many Israeli politicians hope that no longer tolerating polygamy will help to reduce the birth rate and thereby improve the socioeconomic situation of the Bedouin communities. The Bedouin are among the poorest sections of the country’s population, predominantly not integrated into the regular labour market and becoming an increasing economic burden on the state because of their continued growth in number.

Devout versus Secular: Who Will Get the Upper Hand?

While the focus has shifted increasingly to the growing divide between the political Left and Right in recent years, almost half of all Israelis perceive the tensions between religious and secular groups as “high”.¹¹ If one wishes to find out how the growing proportion of the ultra-religious community is changing the country, one only needs to spend a day in West Jerusalem. In hardly any other city is the demographic change as noticeable as here. Many residential areas have gradually changed in character through the influx of Haredi families. On the Sabbath, road blocks are set up to prevent vehicles moving through; the black and white suits of religious men dominate the street scene. According to figures from the Central Bureau of Statistics, only 21 per cent of the Jews in West Jerusalem describe themselves as secular these days. The growing presence of ultra-Orthodox Jews and the gradual takeover of previously predominantly secular residential areas have



Israel's new face? With 6.8 children per family, the Bedouin minority is growing fastest of all population groups. Source: © Finbarr O'Reilly, Reuters.

resulted in many of the less religious inhabitants, particularly those of the younger generation, leaving the city. They are drawn particularly to the liberal city of Tel Aviv and its surroundings.

Ora et Non Labora

Among ultra-Orthodox Jews, the ideal occupation of a man is considered to be daily Torah studies under the instruction of a respected rabbi. Men who excel at the Torah school (*yeshiva*) and become a rabbi gain respect – professional success, by contrast, is mostly regarded as second-rate and transient. The majority of *Haredim* continue studying the Torah into old age, while their working wives are the families' sole breadwinners, yet still expected to run the household and look after the children. As a consequence of this traditional arrangement, more than the half of all ultra-Orthodox men is not integrated into the labour market although the number of those in work is rising. According to the Israeli National Security Institute, two-

thirds of the devout families live on an income below the poverty line. The subsidising of this traditional arrangement by social benefits is a further thorn in the side of Israeli society, which is already propping up a bloated social security apparatus with high taxes and groaning under the burden of the very high cost of living. Many taxpayers are therefore worriedly looking at the demographers' forecasts, asking themselves how the state coffers can possibly keep up with the ever-growing numbers of subsidised Torah scholars.

Another aspect that is causing a great deal of anger and a feeling of injustice is that *yeshiva* students are exempt from military service by legislation dating back to the time the state was founded. In practice, the guaranteed special right, which was instituted by David Ben Gurion, means that the majority of *Haredim* are excused military service while the rest of their compatriots – both young women and men – have to do military duty for two or three years respectively.

Tug of War over the Status Quo

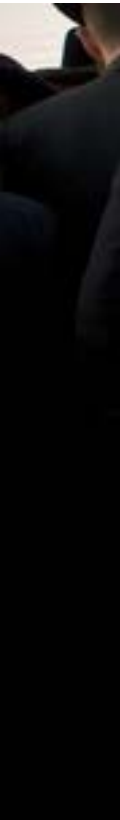
Besides the budgetary burden from the rising cost of social benefits, the increasing influence of the devout on matters of state is provoking mounting antagonism within the social camps. According to the 1948 Israeli Declaration of Independence, Israel is a Jewish state. With regard to the nationalist secular ideology of the founding fathers, the idea was to create a place of self-determination for the Jewish people, while the religious aspect – if relevant at all – was to play a secondary role. Assigning certain competences to the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate in the course of the founding of the state was initially merely a means to an end, namely to convince the anti-Zionist Orthodox party to support the founding of a modern Israeli state. But as neither the Israeli Declaration of Independence nor the Basic Laws clearly define the normative implications of the country's self-definition as a "Jewish state", the issue of the role of religion still figures prominently in the domestic debate today.

A Strengthening Voice

In view of the demographic development and the social changes this entails, a new dynamic is developing in the domestic tug of war over the status quo that has persisted since 1948. Accounting for close to an eighth of the Israeli population, the *Haredim* have become a community of interest to be taken seriously, and one who knows how to defend its interests successfully. The growth in the Orthodox electorate, which also mostly acts in concert unlike the strongly splintered non-Orthodox majority, increases the assertive powers of the two Haredi parties in the Knesset. Thanks to successful voter mobilisation, *Shas* (Sephardic Guards) and "United Torah Judaism" (UTJ) have good representation in the Knesset in any case. Due to their mostly neutral stance towards issues of Middle-East politics and economics, they are a sought-after junior partner in both left and right-wing coalitions.

Shas and the UTJ are adept at using their power to "tip the scales" in the government coalition of the day to oppose efforts to expand control over them and to promote the influence of religious institutions on public life as well as greater financial support for their institutions instead. Only recently, when the coalition appeared in danger of disintegrating due to internal differences, the government decided to abolish budget cuts for ultra-Orthodox schools refusing to include the legal minimum of secular content in their curricula, such as science subjects and English among others.

The creeping influence of the "God fearing" has not gone unopposed by the less religious Israelis. Libertarian organisations such as *Israel Hofsheet* ("Be Free Israel") have hundreds of thousands of sympathisers, who advocate that the authority of the Rabbinate over personal and public matters be curtailed. Particularly the age-old bone of contention of the "Sabbath rest" causes strife throughout the country. The closure of shops, football stadia or swimming pools on the Sabbath touches a nerve with the liberally minded sections of society and brings the critics onto the streets. Very recently, hundreds of furious protestors demonstrated when Prime Minister Netanyahu made a decision in deference to the ultra-Orthodox coalition partners to limit work on the railway infrastructure to be carried out on weekdays – and not on the Sabbath, the day of rest – although this will cause massive traffic problems and costs in the millions. Conversely, the opening of public institutions such as shopping centers and swimming pools rarely goes without attracting protests from the religious side. The attempt to introduce a law on compulsory conscription for *Haredim* in 2014 initiated weeks of mass demonstrations and public prayers by those potentially affected. More than a quarter of a million of the ultra-religious took part in the protest actions on the streets of Jerusalem. And they succeeded: the enforcement of compulsory military service against the will of the individual concerned is currently suspended until 2020.



Arab Israelis: Nationality vs. Identity?

By contrast with the ultra-Orthodox, their Arab compatriots do not form an interest group, but represent a separate ethnicity within the Israeli population. The equality of all citizens whatever their race, religion or gender was enshrined back in 1948 in the Declaration of Independence of the State of Israel. Accordingly, Arab Israelis (excluding the inhabitants of East Jerusalem¹²) have the same rights as their Jewish fellow-citizens. However, they frequently feel like second-class citizens marginalised by the Jewish majority. Apart from inadequate social integration, it is above all their poor economic integration that is an issue for Arab Israelis. The income gap between Arab and Jewish Israelis is considerable. Only three-quarters of Arab men are integrated into the labour market (it is 86 per cent for Jewish men) and a mere third

of Arab women work¹³ – although cultural factors play a crucial role here. According to the socioeconomic indices of the Central Bureau of Statistics, living standards in Arab villages and urban districts are far lower than in Jewish communities.¹⁴ The poverty of many Arab Israeli families resulting from the high unemployment rate is making life increasingly precarious because of the continued rise in living costs in the country. According to a survey conducted by the National Insurance Institute, 53 per cent of all Arab families live below the poverty line.

Given the demographic development of the Arab section of the Israeli population, the government has realised that there is an urgent need for better integration of the Arabs, particularly into the labour market. Consequently, a historic five-year plan to foster the Arab section of the population with a budget



Departure: The strict adherence to religious laws and an isolated lifestyle denote the life of ultra-Orthodox Jews.
Source: © Baz Ratner, Reuters.

of up to 15 billion Israeli shekels was approved last year. Measures under this plan are to focus on housing construction, the education system, efforts to increase gainful employment among Arab women, improving the infrastructure as well as increasing social benefits. However, there have not been any signs of the plan being implemented to date.

Political Representation

Despite poor social and economic integration, the Arab minority has succeeded in being represented in the Knesset ever since the state was founded thanks to the size of its share in the population. There are also some Arab MPs in the other parties, including Likud, which is currently in power. However, Arab parties have not even once formed part of the 34 government coalitions to date. Involvement in government would, in any case, harbour conflict potential not to be underestimated. The Arab parties would then be seen to bear some responsibility for military action in the Palestinian Autonomous Territories among other things. Not only would this result in tensions within the party base, it would also cause a conflict of political interests for many MPs. Today, Arab interests are represented in the Knesset mainly by the “United Arab List”, an association of three Arab parties. During the last parliamentary elections in March 2015, it gained 13 seats, which immediately made it the third strongest parliamentary force. One of the key concerns of the Arab parliamentarians is the Citizenship and Entrance into Israel Law, which came into force in 2003 and has recently been widened. The law denies citizens from the Palestinian Territories, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon among others, who marry an Israeli, the concomitant right to a residency permit and Israeli citizenship. The proponents of this law argue that it serves the purpose of terror prevention and that the provisions are consequently in Israel’s security interest. In addition, it is a way of preventing Israel from being “flooded” by non-Jews. Otherwise, so the argument goes, Israel’s Jewish character would be jeopardised.

Citizens without a Sense of National Identity?

According to a survey conducted by the Israel Democracy Institute last year, 65 per cent of Arab Israelis are proud of their Israeli nationality.¹⁵ At the same time, a survey conducted by the Achva College shows that less than half of the Arab respondents in the same year stated feeling that they could identify with the national flag.¹⁶ One point the Arab population frequently criticises is the way Jewish religious images are integrated into Israel’s national symbols. The fact that the national flag shows a Star of David and that the longing for a Jewish state is expressed in the national anthem makes it difficult for many Arabs to develop a sense of national pride. Many Arab Israelis find themselves torn by a historical conflict where their own national identity is concerned. Instead of taking part in the street parties organised by their Jewish neighbours on Israel’s Independence Day, substantial numbers of Arab Israelis join in with Palestinians living outside Israel commemorating the “Day of Catastrophe” (*Yom an-Nakba*).

The demographic development is forcing Israel to make greater efforts to integrate its Arab population.

The rapid growth of the Arab minority is also always viewed through the lens of the Middle East conflict in Israel, which brings up the question of how the growth in numbers will influence the peace process. A new study conducted by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung¹⁷ has shown that the great majority, namely 87 per cent, of Arab Israelis favour a two-state solution based on the so-called “nine-point package”,¹⁸ far exceeding the proportion of supporters among either Jewish Israelis or Palestinians. While the number of those who believe in the peaceful coexistence of two independent states has dropped among Israeli Arabs as well over the last few years, better integration of the Arab minority has the potential of furthering progress towards a two-state solution.

Nevertheless, the question of the self-image of Arab Israelis frequently becomes a sensitive political issue in the context of the Middle East conflict. Arab Israelis are often accused of being on the side of the Palestinians and of approving the Palestinian terror attacks. This happened again this year, when Arab Knesset MPs went to visit family members of Palestinian assassins, who had been killed by Israeli security forces responding to their armed attack. Particularly members of the government camp criticised the visits as a gesture of solidarity with the families of Palestinian terrorists and accused the MPs of a lack of solidarity with the families of the victims. A controversial law picking up on this criticism was passed by a majority vote (90 out of the 120 votes) in the summer enabling the suspension of MPs from the Knesset if they have been found guilty of “inciting racism” or supporting the armed struggle against the Israeli state. Opponents of the law declared the vote a slap in the face for Israeli democracy and warned that this represented a further attempt to intimidate the Arab minority. In their eyes, the Israeli government was prepared to give up another valuable piece of Israeli democracy to suppress the voice and the influence of the Arab minority. Israel will not be able to perform the balancing act between democracy and Judaism for much longer, warned the opposition.

Is the Jewish State Here to Stay?

The demographic development outlined above illustrates the challenges to be faced by the Jewish State in the coming decades in case the birth rates of the various sections of the population continue to differ as much as they do now. The crucial factor is that the two sections showing the greatest growth are those that are most opposed to Israel’s current make-up. The majority of *Haredim* would prefer to see the Jewish religious laws, the *halakha*, implemented instead of the civil law currently in force.

The so-called Gavison-Medan Covenant¹⁹ of 2003 represented an attempt to outline a contractual agreement between the ultra-religious and secular Jews that would be accept-

able to both sides. The document composed by two respected scholars in constitutional law proposes a compromise for regulating the influence of the Jewish religion on public life in Israel. While curtailing the monopoly of the Rabbinate in matters of family law, for instance, and allowing public services such as transport and events on a Sabbath to a modest extent, the state would in turn undertake to respect and not violate fundamental religious principles. The fact that the much-praised draft has not been followed up by any legal implementation to date illustrates the lack of will on the part of those in responsibility to enter into a compromise and thereby tackle the hot issue of the ‘status quo’.

A Jewish State by Decree?

Seen from another perspective, the growing proportion of Arab Israelis among the population is causing many Jews in the country to ask themselves how this will challenge the Jewish identity of the state, seeing that Arab Israelis do not share either the religious bond with the state nor the Zionist world view of their Jewish fellow-citizens. Particularly politicians from the political Right keep accusing Arab Israelis of not identifying sufficiently with the Israeli state.

The threat to the state’s Jewish character feared by many Israelis has resulted in repeated attempts to enshrine the Jewish nature of the Israeli state more strongly in legislation. Particularly members of the Likud’s right wing as well as MPs from the *HaBayit HaYehudi* and *Israel Beitenu* parties have been the driving forces behind these efforts. Their demand for a “Jewish Nation-State” bill, the first draft of which envisages Hebrew as the only official language, has sparked a heated political and public debate. The bill is aimed mainly at the issue of the current lack of legal codification of the relationship between state and religion.

The proposed bill is a symbol of the enduring political debate on how Israel can maintain both its Jewish and its democratic character. This continues to raise the question as to whether the two apparently contradictory characteristics are



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← Political representation: By the merger of several small parties, the “United Arab List” became the third-strongest party in the parliamentary elections in March 2015. Source: © Ammar Awad, Reuters.

compatible within one system of government. One thing is clear: bringing about an “artificial” shift in favour of the Jewish character through legislation would inevitably entail a loss on the other, the democratic side of the two scales. President Rivlin warned of exactly this complicity during his press conference last summer: “Will this be a secular, liberal state, Jewish and democratic? [...] Will it be a state of all its citizens, of all its national ethnic groups?”²⁰ With these questions he addressed what is a sensitive and highly emotive issue for Israelis. This is because the vision of the founding fathers, in which they defined the state simultaneously as Jewish and democratic, still represents a balancing act today, which is becoming increasingly difficult in view of the governing coalition’s continuing drift to the right. While 76 per cent of Jewish Israelis are still convinced that Israel will be successful in managing this balancing act, only 27 per cent of Arabs believe that to be the case.²¹ But even among the Jewish citizens, the group of those who are worried about the “balance” in the character of the Israeli state is growing. The well-known Israeli sociologist Eva Illouz has come to a clear verdict in view of the current state of society and politics: “Israeli politics has become far more extremist because it has become far more committed to the logic of its ethnic-religious foundations. A Jewish state predicated on Jewish identity was bound to become what it has become: [...] a source of deep inequalities between Jews and Arabs and of incomprehensible inequalities among Jews themselves.”²² Illouz has become the mouthpiece of many secular Israelis.

Conclusion and Outlook

Because of the discrepancies in the demographic development of the individual sections

of the population, differing enormously in their cultural, religious and national identity, the Israeli state currently faces a special challenge. On the one side, there are the Orthodox Jews, representing a deeply religious Jewish group, whose relative numbers are steadily increasing, but whose level of engagement in everyday social life remains low. On the other is the Arab minority, which is also growing as a proportion of the Israeli population. What these groups have in common is the fact that they fundamentally identify less strongly with the basic Zionist ethos – and therefore with the Israeli state as such – than their less devout Jewish or secular fellow-citizens. The rapid growth of these two groups compared to the rest of the population is causing an increasing split in Israeli civil society and a marginalisation of the middle, namely the moderate Jews. To counter this social fragmentation, the ultra-Orthodox Jews will have to be persuaded to make greater efforts to fulfil their social and economic duties. It will also be necessary to do more to accelerate the integration of the Arab Israelis to facilitate identification with their *de jure* homeland. Integrating these two groups better and bringing them closer together will no doubt require compromises and cause considerable conflict; but it will be crucial to allow an integrated, enduring, Jewish Israeli state to develop, which can claim to have revived the secular, Zionist and particularly democratic ethos of its founding fathers.

The continuing demographic changes also set a long-term ultimatum with respect to the issue of a potential two-state solution. If Israel and its Palestinian neighbour are not able to eventually come to an agreement on an independent Palestinian state, the birth rate may produce facts on the ground. The alternative to a Palestinian state, namely a bi-national state of Israel, would inevitably mean the naturalisation of (currently) about 4.5 million Palestinians from the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. However, the Jewish State will only remain viable with a Jewish majority, which would then be impossible to maintain in the long term. Finding a solution to this central issue should therefore not only be in the interest

of the Palestinians but also Israelis. Particularly those Israelis who hold the Jewish character of their homeland especially dear: the political Right.

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