

Epilogue

The European Jewish Communities and the European Union: Supranational and Organizational Challenges

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The days that the European Union (EU) could be dismissed as “being all talk and no action” are long gone. Although the future of the European integration process is yet to be determined, and despite enormous challenges and even crises—Brexit and the refugees, the rise of populism (Filc, chapter 3) and illiberal forces, and perhaps above all the identity crisis—it is clear that the EU is a major political entity, a leading regional player and a “normative power” (Manners, 2002) in the international arena. Clearly, for the present wellbeing and the future of the 1.3 million Jews currently living in the twenty-eight EU member states (DellaPergola, chapter 2), the EU is of paramount importance.

Surprisingly, however, the Jewish communities in Europe are politically organized in anachronistic frameworks that are politically ill-suited to operate in the EU. This lack of an effective organizational structure, moreover, reflects the far more serious absence of a systematic, let alone strategic, thinking on the part of European Jewry about its relations with the EU. By way of an epilogue to a volume dedicated to The Jewish Contribution to European Integration, therefore, we thought it was only right to reflect upon what might contribute to the future wellbeing of Jewish life in the EU.

UNITED EUROPE: IMPLICATIONS AND CHALLENGES

Despite the political and societal developments in Europe, European Jewish communities are still organized under the wide continental umbrella structure

that was established in Europe after World War II. For varied reasons, European Jewry has not yet fully adapted itself to the structural, institutional, sociopolitical and financial changes that Europe has gone through in the past seventy years. As Antony Lerman holds, “The pan-European Jewish bodies that should have fulfilled the role of creating the structures of cooperation for the transfer of resources, expertise, personnel and advice across Europe proved hopelessly inadequate” (Lerman, 2011, p.193). Indeed, the few trans-European bodies that the Jewish communities have established, including the European Jewish Congress (EJC), the European Council of Jewish Communities (ECJC), the Conference of European Rabbis (CFR), and the European Jewish Association (EJA), are poorly structured and are, in most cases, highly dependent on the assistance of foreign actors and non-EU players. And indeed, European Jewry continues to rely on these “outsiders”—mainly American Jewish institutions and the Israeli government—to help it steer and, on occasion, even determine its agenda.

Obviously, at the individual level, Jews can be found in top positions within EU institutions and bodies. Jewish-identified European citizens serve as members of the European Parliament, senior officials, and diplomats. Some have even served as European Commissioners. However, these individual success stories have no influence on the communal-organizational level, which lags behind developments in the EU and thus fails in providing effective leadership for EU Jewry at the supranational level.

If European Jewry is to meet the challenges it is facing in the era of European integration, therefore, it must develop an organizational structure that mirrors the supranational nature of the EU. In fact, the European integration process has the potential to unite the European Jewish communities in all EU member states, both at the ideological-emotional level as well as at the institutional-administrative level. Thanks to the integration process, European Jewish communities can live far more openly than they did in the “Old Europe,” where national governments’ official anti-Semitism required these communities to close themselves off to the outside world. In the “New Europe,” Jewish communities have the potential to thrive and, in so doing, also play a more dominant role in revitalizing Europe.

Since the establishment of the European Economic Community (EEC)/European Community (EC) and later, the EU, Brussels has become an important hub for regional, continental and international lobbying. But EU Jewry is still not well represented in the Union’s capital. This challenge is expected to be far more complicated in the post-Brexit age, when the United Kingdom, home to the second largest Jewish community in the EU, will no longer be a full member of the Union.

Indeed, establishing such a political organization is a complicated task. The European Jewish communities are diverse not only in the social, economic,

and cultural characteristics related to their home countries, but also in their Jewish culture (Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews), level of Jewish identifications, and level of religiosity. While this challenge is not to be underestimated, we believe that European Jewish communities must better organize themselves in a new political umbrella structure of EU Jewry; a new structure that mirrors the “new EU order.”

A NEW ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The first priority for European Jewry is to establish a political framework that will be congruent with the political structure of the EU. Membership in the new pan-EU Jewish bodies should be based on the current twenty-eight/twenty-seven EU member states, and should also include Jewish communities in EU candidate countries (Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Turkey), EU potential candidates (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo), European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland) and the UK, which in the post-Brexit age will probably enjoy a status that will be very close, or even similar, to an EFTA/European Economic Area (EEA) member. European Jewish communities outside these countries should not be members of the new political umbrella bodies of EU Jewry.

In line with the nature of the Union, the new organizational structure of EU Jewry should be somewhere between a confederative and a federative organization. In other words, European Jewry should organize itself in a supranational community that unites under its umbrella all the Jewish communities in the EU twenty-eight/twenty-seven, seven EU potential/candidate countries, the EFTA four and the UK. Like the EU model, this umbrella body of thirty-nine Jewish communities should operate at three different levels or frameworks: at the individual community level, the national level and at the supranational level, alongside EU institutions and bodies. According to this new organizational structure, the supranational framework should deal only with political supranational issues that are relevant to EU Jewry, while the national and the communal levels should dedicate their work to Jewish education, culture and social affairs at these two levels.

The new Jewish umbrella structure should be based in Brussels, next to the EU institutions. A Brussels-based Jewish structure will be able to develop a more effective Jewish leadership. Moreover, the small Jewish communities that fail to operate at the national level will now enjoy the attention and the support of the supranational level. Also, such a structure will recognize the differences between the Jewish communities, their different traditions, languages and cultures within which they are operating (Maimon, chapter 5,

DellaPergola, 2). The new structure is expected to strengthen the Jewish communities in the EU area and space of influence, and to support the supranational Jewish leadership in becoming a single and united voice for EU Jewry in the most important EU decision making/shaping capital.

LACK OF A STRATEGY TOWARD THE EU

¹One of the consequences of lacking an organizational structure that is congruent with the European integration process is the lack of a systematic, let alone strategic, thinking on the relationship between European Jewry and the EU.

The lack of a strategy toward the EU is a serious omission, which can easily carry a high cost for European Jewry's national and continental standing and security, harm the fight against anti-Semitism, and hurt relations with Israel. To be sure, the need for a strategy is also pronounced in the EU, as evidenced, for instance, by the Union's failed policies in its fight against anti-Semitism. But the situations of European Jewry and the EU are not symmetric. The European Jewish communities' weaknesses of strategic thinking in relation to the EU is much more costly and dangerous for European Jewry than the lack of strategic thinking on relations with the Jewish communities is for the EU. For this reason, it is up to European Jewry to take the initiative in crafting a strategy vis-à-vis the EU without waiting for the EU to think better on its relations with the European Jewish communities.

There is little benefit in crafting a strategy for actors who do not have assets for implementing it. But European Jewry has numerous strategic assets. These assets are both positive, in the sense that they are capable of benefiting the EU, and negative, in the sense that they can also harm the EU. Taken together, these include the following:

1. The ability to assist the EU institutions in cementing the ties with Israel (Pardo & Peters, 2010, 2012; Heimann & Herman, 2019); and, as a consequence, to influence the role of the EU in Middle Eastern affairs as well; particularly with respect to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Such an influence has an impact on the global and regional standing of the EU (Bouris, 2014; Dosenrode & Stubkjær, 2002; Ifestos, 1987; Musu, 2010; Müller, 2013; Pardo & Peters, 2010; Persson, 2014).
2. The ability to improve Jewish-Muslim relations in all EU member states (Meddeb, Stora, Todd & Smith, 2013).
3. The ability to assist in the joint struggle against anti-Semitism (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018), as well as to broaden the

effort to include other categories of racial and religious discrimination, including, of course, Islamophobia (Sivan & Maimon, 2009).

4. The capacity to influence the soft power (Nye, 2004) of the American Jewish community and its actions with respect to United States of America (USA)-EU relations.
5. The ability to strengthen and mobilize Jewish soft power in home countries of the largest European Jewish communities in the EU—the United Kingdom, France, and Germany (Pardo, 2005).

Additional assets, which, in significant aspects are even more important, are the many common values and shared historical and cultural traditions between the two sides (Pardo & Zahavi, chapter 1); intense networks of personal and professional relations; European feelings of guilt for the Holocaust; and—most important of all—a fundamental commitment of the EU and its member states to the safety and prosperity of European Jewry.

However, many of the above assets of European Jewry are counter-balanced and often out-weighted by EU assets, which can bring about many benefits or cause grievous harm to the European Jewish communities. This leads to a very important conclusion that deepening and strengthening relations with the EU is an urgent need for European Jewry.

SOME PRINCIPLES FOR A EUROPEAN JEWISH STRATEGY TOWARD THE EU

While we do not presume to dictate the fundamental elements of the strategy, a few directions may be in order. One key principle is strengthening European Jewish soft power, which is already considerable (Nye, 2004). Indeed, Jewish soft power in the European context arises from the shared values and beliefs that European culture has traditionally had with Jewish civilization. But the strength of this power depends on other vectors, including contemporary Jewish politics and, increasingly in recent decades and not unrelatedly, Israeli domestic and foreign policies. For these reasons, the challenge of European Jewry is to map out comprehensive policies that will be based on broad, comprehensive and long-term definitions of the interests of the European Jewish communities across a wide spectrum of issues (Pardo, 2005, p. 8).

The possible elements comprising a Jewish strategy toward the EU are many. Below are a few of them:

1. Recognizing and explicating shared long-term interests.
2. Understanding better EU values, interests and world views.

3. Putting relations with the EU into the context of other possible strategies, such as toward Israel, Islam, the USA and global governance.
4. Striving to cooperate with the EU on supranational and global challenges, such as the dangers of a clash of cultures, Islam in Europe, and the rise of populism, extremism and illiberal forces (Filc, chapter 3).
5. Assisting and supporting the deepening of EU-Israeli relations as much as possible, while at the same time encouraging closer and deeper EU involvement in the Middle East peace processes.
6. Strengthening dialogues between people of different faiths, especially with the Muslim communities in Europe; crafting a joint strategy on the fight against anti-Semitism; and joining the EU and the European Muslim communities in the fight against Islamophobia.
7. Persisting in demanding EU support as a moral duty of all EU member states following the Holocaust.

A strategy that will ultimately bolster the alliance with the EU should strengthen the soft power of the Jewish people, also in the sense that the EU enjoys a considerable amount of “normative power” (Manners, 2002). An alliance with such a power should strengthen the legitimacy of the Jewish people, not only in Europe, but probably all over the world. There is no doubt that the Union’s leadership would welcome any Jewish contribution for building a more open, diverse and tolerant EU area. A successful strategy will not only contribute to the future wellbeing of Jewish life in European society; it will also deepen the Jewish contribution to European society.

NOTE

1. This section draws on Dror & Pardo, 2006.

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