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Views from the Neighbourhood: Israel

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Europe in a changing neighbourhood

The past few years have been marked by a series of crises not only in the European Union (EU) but also in its immediate southern Mediterranean neighbours.¹ The December 2010 protests in Tunisia captured the popular imagination and spawned a wave of uprisings across the Middle East and the Maghreb countries, which the international media dubbed the Arab Spring. Demanding political and economic reforms, the peoples of the Middle East and the Maghreb swept away the old regimes and began the hard challenge of forging a new political reality. The protesters across this region not only affected their domestic politics but also challenged their immediate neighbour to the north, the EU. The Arab uprisings called into question the distinctiveness and the exceptionalism of the EU, which scholars variously label 'civilian power' (Duchêne, 1972) and 'normative power' (Manners, 2002). Through their silence, and their historical support of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East, the EU and the member states' normative power seemed acquiescent in the suppression of human rights and freedoms. Experts and commentators have already started to discuss and analyse the gap between the EU's normative stance on the Middle East and the member states' practices in this region. This gap has put the credibility of the EU under strain, with particular emphasis on the idea of the EU as a normative power (Peters, 2012; Lucarelli, 2013).

The one country in the region that remained stable and secure during this period and in which Normative Power Europe (NPE), therefore, was not put into question by the events sweeping across the Middle East has been Israel. And yet the status of the EU in Israel – including its reputation of the NPE – did not go unchallenged during this same

period. In fact, even as the EU strengthened its trade importance with Israel, it also deepened its political irrelevance for Israelis as reflected in their images and perceptions of the EU in general and NPE in particular.

This chapter offers insights into Israel's assessment of the EU's standing and actorness in its immediate neighbourhood – a thematic angle that is also explored in Chapter 8 (focusing on Georgia) and Chapter 9 (focusing on Ukraine, Turkey and Morocco). This chapter examines empirical findings elaborating the key attitudes of the Israeli general public, political elites, organized civil society and the news media towards the EU. Similar to the other two chapters, this analysis is concerned with the reception of the idea of NPE in the immediate neighbourhood. Importantly, it questions the influence (if any) that NPE has had on Israeli policies through the power of attraction (Rhodes, 1998). In its conceptual contribution, this chapter aims to bridge the gap between NPE scholarship and EU external perceptions studies. While EU external perceptions studies have considered the role of NPE in the EU's foreign policy, NPE scholarship has largely overlooked the role and conceptualization of EU external perceptions in its normative discussions and models (see also Larsen, 2014).

This chapter starts with a detailed account of Israeli images and perceptions of NPE in the aftermath of the Arab Spring and in the midst of the Eurozone sovereign debt crisis. Three key Israeli visions of the EU are identified – namely, a consistent conviction that good political relations with the EU are not critical for Israel; a belief that Israel could and should join the EU in the foreseeable future; and a belief that EU policies towards Israel are deeply rooted and rigid and that the EU is an anti-Semitic power. Four discourses are overviewed: public opinion (four national polls conducted in 2007, 2009, 2011 and 2013, with samples of 511, 600, 1057 and 561 respondents, respectively), news media (content analysis of daily coverage of the EU in 2012 in four leading newspapers representing the full ideological spectrum), civil society (monitoring of 100 websites of major Israeli trade unions, academic institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in 2013 and 30 face-to-face interviews) and analysis of the political elite discourse (analysis of Israeli official rhetoric of 2005–2013). All data were collected in the course of the ongoing project entitled *The EU in Israeli Eyes: Public, Elite, Civil Society and Media Perceptions of the EU*, supported by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) and the German-Israeli Foundation for Scientific Research and Development (GIF). This combination of several sources of perceptions data provides an opportunity to cross-check

the validity of findings and the reconstruction of a complicated puzzle of EU perceptions in third countries.

Normative Power Europe

Ian Manners (2002) coined the term NPE to argue that the EU's role is to promote democratic and human rights values worldwide. He explains that 'the concept of normative power is an attempt to refocus analysis away from the empirical emphasis on the EU's institutions or policies, and towards including cognitive processes, with both substantive and symbolic components' (Manners, 2002, p. 239). Arguably, one such process consists of perceiving and imagining the EU and its normative identity and message outside the EU's borders. Manners goes on to emphasize the ideational impact of the EU, arguing that it

has gone further towards making its external relations informed by, and conditional on, a catalogue of norms which come closer to those of the European convention on human rights and fundamental freedoms (ECHR) and the universal declaration of human rights (UDHR) than most other actors in world politics.

(Manners, 2002, p. 241)

Manners concludes that in the post-Cold War period the EU deepened its commitment to placing universal norms and principles 'at the centre of its relations with its Member States and the world' (Manners, 2002, p. 241).

Using Israel as a case study, the findings in this chapter are useful to gauge not only the EU's normative influence in Israel but to a large extent also in the southern Mediterranean neighbourhood (Chaban *et al.*, 2013, p. 439; Gordon and Pardo, 2013; Gordon and Pardo, forthcoming). Perceptions of the EU are argued to be one possible explanation standing behind the acceptance (or rejection) of NPE. With perceptions of the EU and its normative influences being shaped on the three temporal scales – micro, medium and long duration (see Chapter 3 as well as the Introduction to this volume) – this analysis starts with a brief overview of EU-Israeli historical relations.

Uneasy neighbours

Israel's relationship with the EU began in early 1957, when Israel explored the possibility of obtaining European Economic Community

(EEC) membership (Pardo, 2013b). In April 1958, Israel became the third country in the world to request the establishment of a diplomatic mission accredited to the EEC, and, in February 1959, Israel and the EEC formally established full diplomatic relations (Pardo and Peters, 2010, 2012).

The first trade agreement between Israel and the EEC was signed in 1964 and was of a non-preferential nature. In 1970 a new five-year preferential trade agreement was signed, which was part of the general European Community Global Mediterranean Policy. In 1975 the two partners signed their first free trade area agreement, under which the European Community agreed to abolish trade barriers on Israeli-manufactured goods by the end of 1979.

Since 1975, trade, economic, political, scientific and cultural cooperation have consolidated EU-Israeli relations. Currently the EU is Israel's largest source of imports and exports. In 2013, 34 per cent of Israel's imports (excluding diamonds) came from the EU and 32 per cent of its exports (excluding diamonds) were directed to the European market (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2014). Israel, of course, is a much smaller trading partner from the viewpoint of the EU. In 2013, Israel was ranked as the EU's 28th major trade partner (European Commission, 2014).

The 1975 trade agreement held sway until Israel and the EU signed the 1995 Association Agreement (AA; Document 4/23, Pardo and Peters, 2012) in the context of the newly established Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. The AA entered into force in 2000 and since then it has formed the legal basis for EU-Israeli relations.

Israel is the first non-European country that was fully associated with the EU's Framework Programmes for Research (FP) and it is one of the most successful countries in terms of programme participation. By virtue of the FP, the EU is now Israel's second biggest source of research funding. In July 2013 the European Commission published the EU's *Guidelines on the Eligibility of Israeli Entities and their Activities in the Territories Occupied by Israel since 1967 for Grants, Prizes and Financial Instruments Funded by the EU from 2014 Onwards* (hereafter the *EU's Guidelines*; European Commission, 2013), according to which since January 2014 the EU no longer funds or dispenses awards and research grants to Israeli entities operating within the Occupied Territories (OT).

Following the launch of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2004, the EU and Israel adopted the EU-Israeli Action Plan. The ENP has bolstered EU-Israeli relations, and in December 2008 the two partners decided to 'upgrade' their relations within the framework of the

ENP (Documents 5/41 and 5/55, Pardo and Peters, 2012). However, in response to Israel's military incursion into Gaza that same month, the EU froze the so-called 'Upgrade Process', declaring that it needed to be seen in the broader context of sustained progress towards a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Document 5/46, Pardo and Peters, 2012). Still, in July 2012, European foreign ministers 'updated' EU-Israeli relations (Council of the European Union, 2012).

Despite these bilateral instruments, political relations between Israel and the EU have not always been smooth, and by and large they have lagged behind the institutional-economic ones. In a sense, EU-Israeli relations can be described as unfolding on two parallel tracks – with the economic one far exceeding the normative-political one. Over the years, despite occasional European normative-political statements that EU-Israeli economic relations cannot be divorced from the broader context of sustained progress towards a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, efforts to link the two tracks have largely failed (Pardo and Peters, 2010, 2012).

Two recent examples of the failure of NPE to influence Israeli policies in the OT can be found in the 2008–2009 'Upgrade Process' and in the 2013 *EU's Guidelines*. In both cases it appeared for a moment that the EU's normative positions would actually have an influence on its economic and trade policies with Israel, but ultimately the EU's pattern of dissociating its normative stance from trade interests with Israel persisted. With regard to the Upgrade Process, in July 2012 the EU 'updated' its relations with Israel, effectively upgrading the relationship in 60 concrete activities in over 15 specific fields and enhancing cooperation with a number of EU agencies within the current Action Plan. As for the *EU's Guidelines*, five months after they were published and despite strong Israeli protestation, the EU and Israel reached an agreement that rendered hollow the EU's normative position and allowed Israel to join the Horizon 2020 research programme (Keinon, 2013a; see also Gordon and Pardo, 2014).

For the past 47 years, in fact, the EU's normative-political discontent with Israel has arguably had no perceptible impact on its trade and economic relations with Israel. In recent articles, Gordon and Pardo (2013; forthcoming) maintain that the split in the European approach helps to explain both NPE's power and weakness. They argued that the coherency of the EU's normative position stems from the fact that it almost never has an effect on the trade relations fostered by individual EU member states. Indeed, this is precisely the reason why all of the member states are willing to subscribe to a unified normative

standpoint. The divorce between the economic-trade and the normative enables the EU to speak in a single voice and to uphold a clear message informed by principles of democracy and human rights. On the other hand, the dichotomy between the economic and the normative spheres also explains NPE's weakness. It enables EU member states to promote and cultivate trade relations with countries that violate basic human rights. And while this certainly benefits the economies of the member states, it does little to enhance the diffusion of the five core norms that are underscored by Manners (2002).

This brief historical overview shows that the medium temporal scale – half a century – was crucial in shaping relations between the EU and Israel. This analysis now moves on to identifying the key Israeli perceptions and attitudes towards the EU, which were shaped by those historical interactions, and which will shape future EU-Israeli relations around the time of, and after, the European sovereign debt crisis.

Findings: Israeli perceptions and images of the EU

Public opinion

My research over the past eight years has demonstrated that the EU is perceived in Israel as hostile to fundamental Israeli national goals. As mentioned above, the four national public opinion surveys (telephone/internet-based surveys) were conducted in 2007, 2009, 2011 and 2013, with representative samples of 511, 600, 1057 and 561 respondents, respectively. The reason for this public perception lies in the fact that, even as the EU and all of its members repeatedly state their commitment to the existence and survival of Israel, they do not shy away from criticizing key Israeli policies (Pardo and Peters, 2010, 2012). Undoubtedly, these normative criticisms contribute to some of the most dominant perceptions and images that are shaping Israeli attitudes toward the EU, especially when it comes to the EU's involvement in the Middle East peace process (MEPP).

In the 2013 national survey on Israeli attitudes towards the EU (Pardo, 2013a), I found that 50 per cent of the Israeli public were of the opinion that the USA or the EU should be part of the MEPP. When the respondents were asked which country/entity they preferred seeing involved in the MEPP, 42 per cent replied the USA as opposed to 8 per cent who said the EU. Notwithstanding these results, 31 per cent of the respondents to my 2011 national survey (Pardo, 2011) and 35 per cent to the 2013 survey thought that EU involvement in the region in recent years had prevented progress in the MEPP.²

The EU's standing with regard to the MEPP cannot be understood without a deeper appreciation of the most dominant Israeli perceptions of the EU. For the last decade, three major perceptions, widely shared by both the general public and the political elites, have affected Israeli attitudes toward the EU and influenced Israeli policies *vis-à-vis* the EU.

The most fundamental Israeli perception of the EU is that good political relations with it are not really critical for Israel. In the Pardo 2013 national survey (2013a), 64 per cent of people who were polled considered relations with the USA as more important than relations with the EU or any other EU member state/international organization. Only 8 per cent considered relations with the EU as more important than relations with the USA. When we excluded the USA as a possible answer in our 2011 national survey, 43 per cent of the respondents considered relations with the EU as more important than relations with the United Nations (UN) or any other EU member state/international organization (Pardo, 2011). Furthermore, 69 per cent of the respondents to the KAS and Pardo 2007 survey said that culturally they feel that they have more in common with Americans than with Europeans. Only 20 per cent of the respondents felt that they had culturally more in common with Europeans than with Americans (KAS and Pardo, 2007).³

An additional perception, which might be said to be contradictory to the first, is that the EU represents a hospitable framework for Israeli accession, and therefore that Israel could and should join the EU within the foreseeable future. This Israeli perception is driven by Israelis' hopes, desires and expectations of joining the EU.

In the KAS and Pardo 2009 national survey, as well as in the 2013 national survey, 69 per cent of the Israeli public strongly supported, somewhat supported or tended to support the idea that Israel should join the EU (KAS and Pardo, 2009; Pardo, 2013a).⁴ In my 2011 national survey, an overwhelming majority of 81 per cent of those surveyed either strongly supported or somewhat supported Israeli membership of the EU (Pardo, 2011).

In addition, in the wake of the 2007 EU enlargement, Israel today probably has the largest concentration, outside the EU, of would-be EU citizens: in the 2009 KAS and Pardo survey, 40 per cent of Israeli Jews were identified as potential EU citizens by virtue of their European ancestry (KAS and Pardo, 2009). Many are taking up the new opportunity afforded to them. As of May 2013, 9 per cent of Israelis already held the citizenship of one of the 28 EU member states (Pardo, 2013a).

The third fundamental perception follows from the first and accentuates the tension with the second – namely, that anti-Israeli attitudes

and geostrategic views that are detrimental to the security of Israel are deeply rooted in the EU. Underlying this perception are Israeli feelings that the EU is an anti-Semitic power.

Our 2013 survey reveals that 83 per cent of those surveyed thought that the EU is not doing enough to prevent anti-Semitism in Europe. Likewise, 52 per cent of the respondents to the survey thought that the EU is not doing enough to prevent Islamophobia in Europe (Pardo, 2013a).

Political elites

Since 2005, hundreds of leading Israeli politicians and policy-makers have been interviewed and their public EU-related statements monitored. Although Israeli policy-makers are aware of the importance of the EU to Israel, many of them share the public's perception that good political relations with the EU are not critical for Israel. In an August 2013 statement that hyperbolically reflects Israeli dismissal of the EU, the economy minister, Naftali Bennett, urged the Israeli government 'to end all cooperation with the EU' in response to the July 2013 *EU Guidelines*, 'even if such cooperation would boost Israel's economy' (Lis, 2013). 'In the midst of Tisha Be'av', Bennett continued, in reference to the Jewish fast over the destruction of the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem: 'the Europeans are the last ones who can tell us that we are fasting over occupied territory' (Keinon, 2013b).

Echoing the same attitude in June 2013, Avigdor Liberman, then chairman of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, described the EU's decision of June 2013 not to add Hezbollah to its list of terrorist organizations as 'hypocrisy incarnate [which would] make the EU irrelevant, as far as we [Israelis] are concerned, when it comes to dealing with the region'. Liberman added that 'we need to stop our dialogue with the EU... it's pointless'. According to Liberman, the EU makes demands of Israel but does nothing in return. 'How does Europe contribute to Israeli security? I keep saying we need to cut them off' (Harkov and Keinon, 2013).

The Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has voiced similar perceptions towards the EU. In December 2012, amid international criticism of Israel's approval of construction plans in the OT, Netanyahu stated that Israel 'will build in Jerusalem because this is our right. What Europe and the international community say is of no interest to me' (*Channel Two*, 2012).

At the political level, a number of Israeli leaders share the public's perception that Israel could and should join the EU within the foreseeable

future. Thus, for instance, in November 2010, Avigdor Liberman, then deputy prime minister and minister of foreign affairs, insisted that Israel should become a member of the EU. According to him, 'as regards economics, cultural affairs, tourism and human values, we [Israelis] feel part of united Europe, and Israel should become a member of the EU. It is impossible to imagine modern Europe... without Jewish spirit'. Israel 'sees itself as part of Europe and does not seek to redivide [territory]', Liberman added (*Interfax*, 2010). Likewise, his party's (Yisrael Beytenu) platform ahead of the 2009 general elections stated that

one of the clear goals of *Yisrael Beytenu* is Israel's joining of the EU and NATO... Membership in the EU would gain Israel greater political influence in an ever-strengthening Europe and contribute much to the economy. We can achieve this goal in the near future and should make every effort to make it come about.

(Yisrael Beytenu, 2009, p. 13)

In the same vein, in November 2002, the then foreign minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, declared that Israel favoured joining the EU and asked Italy to help it achieve this goal (Galatz, 2002).

A slightly different perspective has been offered by the former Israeli president, Shimon Peres, who holds that if the Israelis, Palestinians and Jordanians sign a peace agreement, 'they should be accepted as members of a united Europe', in which the three countries could form a trading partnership or 'a modern Benelux' (CBC, 2004).

Importantly, there are also voices in the EU that support such thinking, feeding this Israeli perception that Israeli membership of the EU is plausible. Among these voices, for instance, is the former Lithuanian prime minister, Andrius Kubilius, who in December 2010 declared his support for Israeli membership of the EU and his willingness 'to vote for this tomorrow!'. In his words 'we need Israel' in the EU because 'we need a large mass of brain power that will help us to compete with these markets' (Kubilius, 2010).

Likewise, the former Italian prime minister, Silvio Berlusconi, was for many years a vociferous advocate of Israel's accession to the EU. Over the past decade he has repeatedly declared Italy's support for Israeli membership in the EU. As he put it in 2004, 'As far as Italy is concerned, Israel is completely European in terms of standard of living, heritage and cultural values. Geography is not a determinant' (Globes, 2004; Ynet, 2009; Bengal, 2010). Lending credence to one of Berlusconi's statements, the former Spanish foreign minister and the rotating president of

the Council of the EU at the time, Miguel Moratinos, stated that 'Israeli accession to the EU depends on Israel and if such an official request would be submitted, the EU would consider it' (Somfalvi, 2010).

For the former High Representative, Javier Solana, Israel is already a member of the EU. In October 2009, Solana surprised the Israeli president and his guests at a Jerusalem conference by stating that Israel is 'closer to the EU than any other country in the world outside Europe'. For Solana, Israel 'is a member of the EU without being a member of the institutions' (Solana, 2009).

Israeli political elites also share the general public's perception that EU policies towards Israel are deeply rooted and rigid, and even coloured by anti-Semitism. Thus, for instance, in recent years the Israeli Cabinet has regularly discussed European anti-Semitism. The perception is so widely shared that, in response to the July 2013 publication of the *EU's Guidelines*, the housing minister, Uri Ariel, could charge that the EU's decision on the guidelines is tainted by 'racism, anti-Semitism and discrimination against the Jewish people which is reminiscent of boycotts of the Jews in Europe over 66 years ago' (Somfalvi, 2013).

Similarly, on the eve of a May 2013 visit to Israel by the UK's foreign secretary, Yuval Steinitz, minister of international relations, strategic affairs and intelligence, attacked UK attitudes towards Israel as 'disguised anti-Semitism'. Speaking to the *Daily Telegraph*, Steinitz, who is also a close confidant of the prime minister, Netanyahu, opined that 'anti-Semitism existed in Britain to a certain extent... manifesting itself in negative attitudes to the Jewish state' (Tait, 2013).

In December 2012, following an EU statement criticizing Israel's new settlement constructions plans, Avigdor Liberman, the then deputy prime minister and minister of foreign affairs, accused EU foreign ministers of behaving like 'Nazi quietists' and compared recent actions by the EU and its members towards Israel to European actions during the Holocaust. He added that he 'is not happy with Europe's position that for another time in history it ignores calls to destroy Israel' (Keinon, 2012). On the same day, Liberman went even further and declared that 'from the point of view of some European foreign ministers, Israel's destruction is apparently something that is taken for granted' (Ravid, 2012).

Civil society

At the level of Israeli civil society, the images and perceptions of the EU are somewhat different. As mentioned above, 100 websites of major Israeli trade unions, academic institutions and NGOs were surveyed in

January 2013. The content analysis focused on the terms 'European Union' and 'Europe'. An additional component of this analysis consisted of personal interviews with 30 leaders, directors and board members of Israel's leading trade unions, academic institutions and NGOs.

Some 33 websites (33 per cent) of the examined organizations made some kind of reference to the EU/Europe in their websites, 11 per cent of the organizations included a picture and text referring to the EU/Europe, and 12 per cent of the websites included a textual reference to the EU/Europe. In the 33 websites that mentioned the EU/Europe, I counted 17 positive (52 per cent), four negative (12 per cent) and 12 informative references (36 per cent). I then catalogued all of the references according to ten themes.⁵

On the face of it, the figure of 33 per cent for organizations that made some kind of reference to the EU/Europe in their websites represents a significant quantitative measure. However, a contextual analysis of these references evinces a far less central role for the EU/Europe than the merely quantitative figure suggests.

That said, it is important to emphasize that Israeli civil society is not unified in its approach to the EU. It is possible to divide Israeli civil society organizations into three categories: those that are not concerned with the EU and for which the EU has no direct relevance to their work; those that know that the EU can assist them but are not part of the group of organizations that enjoy the EU's financial support; and those that enjoy the EU's financial support. This third group includes liberal civil society organizations that see the EU as a potential political and ideological partner. They believe that the EU respects the work of the civil society even if their work is in tension with the policies of the Israeli government. Not surprisingly, these organizations perceive the EU as the global defender of human rights and as an independent global power.

Most Israeli civil society organizations are financially dependent on foreign financial funding. The USA is thought to be the largest financial supporter of these organizations. However, it is important to note that most of the financial support does not come directly from the US government but rather from Jewish communities in the USA. Echoing the implicit political faultlines between American and European funders, those civil society organizations that get their funding from the EU, and especially the organizations that work on Israeli-Palestinian/Arab human rights issues, often stress that they prefer the funding that comes from the EU over that that comes from US-based sources.⁶

Unlike other Israeli sectors, most of the civil society organizations that I surveyed do not perceive the EU as an anti-Semitic power. Quite the

opposite, in fact: most of them report that they have never been faced with any anti-Semitic behaviour. At the same time, however, most of these Israeli civil society organizations reported that they would like Israel to strengthen relations with the EU; indeed, like the general public, some of them would even like to see Israel as a full member of the EU.

Media images of the EU

This section is an analysis of the content of four leading national Hebrew daily newspapers: *Haaretz*, *The Marker*, *Yedioth Ahronoth* and *Israel Hayom*. These cover the Israeli ideological spectrum from left to right.⁷ The analysis spans all news items in the printed editions of these newspapers between 1 January 2012 and 31 December 2012, in which any of the names of the 27 EU members at the time or the terms 'EU' and/or 'Europe' were mentioned in the headline or in the subheadline, either in a value-laden context or in which it was used in a descriptive, factual manner. I then used a simple matrix to catalogue each news item according to the position that it conveyed and whether the context was positive, negative, neutral or a simple presentation of general information. I also checked to see whether it concerned anti-Semitism, culture, domestic affairs, domestic politics, economics and trade, foreign relations, gossip, immigration, Islam, Israel-EU business relations, Israel-EU cultural relations, Israel-EU economic relations, Israel-EU foreign relations, Jewish diaspora and tourism. The results are summarized in tables 7.1, 7.2, 7.3 and 7.4.

The number of news items relating to the EU and its member states is almost equal across Israel's four leading daily newspapers. *The Marker* published 27 per cent of all of the news items, *Haaretz* published 26 per cent, *Yedioth Ahronoth* published 24 per cent and *Israel Hayom* published the remaining 23 per cent.

Out of the EU27, France is mentioned the most often by the Israeli newspapers. One may think that the focus on France stems from rapprochement in French-Israeli relations. However, the content was dedicated less to the bilateral relations and covered mainly the French elections of 2012 as well as the 'Toulouse massacre' in which a French Islamist gunman murdered French Jewish schoolchildren and a rabbi. While 27 per cent and 26 per cent of the news items published in *Israel Hayom* and *Yedioth Ahronoth*, respectively, focused on France, the majority of them were dedicated either to the 'Toulouse massacre' (36 per cent in *Israel Hayom* and 19 per cent in *Yedioth Ahronoth*) or to the French elections (10 per cent and 23 per cent, respectively). *Haaretz*, too, focused

Table 7.1 Press coverage of the EU in Israel's four leading newspapers, January 2012–December 2012

Month	<i>Haaretz</i>	<i>The Marker</i>	<i>Israel Hayom</i>	<i>Yedioth Ahronoth</i>	Total
January	57	94	59	53	263
February	46	56	54	48	204
March	57	55	103	53	268
April	58	48	32	42	180
May	81	62	51	53	247
June	57	98	31	59	245
July	51	58	50	72	231
August	55	47	33	44	179
September	43	43	35	41	162
October	55	46	42	30	173
November	43	36	30	31	140
December	34	28	50	49	161
Total	637 (26%)	671 (27%)	570 (23%)	575 (24%)	2,453 (100%)
Average per month	53	56	48	48	

Source: Pardo and Zydel, 2012.

on France more than on any other EU member (25 per cent of the news items), but most of its items covered the French elections.⁸

Next to France, the UK received the most attention in Israel's leading newspapers. The focus on the UK, however, was less political than personal. While 19 per cent and 17 per cent of the news items published in *Israel Hayom* and *Yedioth Ahronoth*, respectively, focused on the UK, the majority of them were dedicated to pure gossip regarding either the London Olympic Games or the personal life of the Royal Family. *Haaretz* and *The Marker* each dedicated 13 per cent of their news items to the UK. While mainly concentrating on the Olympic Games and the Royal Family, these two newspapers also discussed the UK's role in the European sovereign debt crisis. Incidentally, the national survey further reveals that the UK is the most popular European country in Israel, enjoying the support of 66 per cent of Israelis (Pardo, 2013a).

Given the European sovereign debt crisis, the EU's institutions came third in the total number of all news items. Dealing mainly with economic issues, 24 per cent of the news items published in *The Marker* discussed the involvement of the EU institutions in the Eurozone sovereign debt crisis. *The Marker* heavily criticized the institutions' activities in 2012. In all, 53 per cent of its news items about the EU's institutions were negative, 32 per cent were neutral or informative,

Table 7.2 Coverage in Israel's four leading newspapers by theme, January 2012–December 2012

Theme	<i>Haaretz</i>	<i>The Marker</i>	<i>Israel Hayom</i>	<i>Yedioth Ahronoth</i>	Total
Anti-Semitism	23 (4%)	–	76 (14%)	20 (4%)	119 (5%)
Culture	17 (3%)	3 (0.5%)	6 (1%)	10 (2%)	36 (1%)
Domestic affairs	291 (45%)	117 (17%)	141 (25%)	197 (33%)	746 (30%)
Domestic politics	90 (14%)	30 (4%)	62 (11%)	55 (9%)	237 (9%)
Economics and trade	27 (4%)	449 (66%)	48 (8%)	97 (16%)	621 (25%)
Foreign relations	75 (12%)	23 (3%)	58 (10%)	36 (6%)	192 (8%)
Gossip	18 (3%)	3 (0.5%)	30 (5%)	56 (9%)	107 (4%)
Immigration	8 (1%)	3 (0.5%)	–	–	11 (0.5%)
Islam	10 (2%)	–	7 (1%)	2 (0.5%)	19 (1%)
Israel–EU business relations	4 (1%)	23 (3.5%)	3 (0.5%)	13 (2%)	43 (2%)
Israel–EU cultural relations	6 (1%)	–	2 (0.5%)	8 (1%)	16 (0.5%)
Israel–EU economic relations	–	15 (2%)	6 (1%)	2 (0.5%)	23 (1%)
Israel–EU foreign relations	46 (5%)	8 (1%)	104 (18%)	70 (12%)	228 (9%)
Jewish diaspora	24 (4%)	–	18 (3%)	23 (4%)	65 (3%)
Tourism	4 (1%)	11 (2%)	11 (2%)	4 (1%)	30 (1%)
Total	643 (100%)	685 (100%)	572 (100%)	593 (100%)	2,493 (100%)

Source: Pardo and Zydel, 2012.

Table 7.3 Coverage of EU institutions and EU member states in Israel's four leading newspapers by value, January 2012–December 2012

EU institutions/ member state	Number of Mentions	Neutral	Negative	Positive
EU institutions	277 (14%)	98 (35%)	126 (46%)	53 (19%)
UK	377 (19%)	173 (46%)	112 (30%)	92 (24%)
France	516 (26%)	292 (57%)	126 (24%)	98 (19%)
Germany	234 (12%)	89 (38%)	86 (37%)	59 (25%)
Greece	252 (13%)	72 (29%)	155 (61%)	25 (10%)
Italy	164 (9%)	82 (50%)	46 (28%)	36 (22%)
Spain	141 (7%)	46 (33%)	77 (54%)	18 (13%)
Total	1,961 (100%)	852 (44%)	728 (37%)	381 (19%)

Source: Pardo and Zydel, 2012.

Table 7.4 Number of references to the EU/Europe and EU member states in Israel's four leading newspapers, January 2012–December 2012

Newspaper	Position			
	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Total
<i>Haaretz</i>	318 (50%)	209 (33%)	110 (17%)	637 (26%)
<i>The Marker</i>	261 (39%)	360 (54%)	50 (7%)	671 (27%)
<i>Israel Hayom</i>	220 (39%)	211 (37%)	139 (24%)	570 (23%)
<i>Yedioth Ahronoth</i>	233 (40%)	205 (36%)	137 (24%)	575 (24%)
Total	1,032 (42%)	985 (40%)	436 (18%)	2,453 (100%)

Source: Pardo and Zydel, 2012.

and the remaining 15 per cent were positive. *Haaretz*, *Israel Hayom* and *Yedioth Ahronoth* dedicated 7 per cent, 6 per cent and 5 per cent, respectively, to the EU's institutions. Taken together, 41 per cent of the news items in these three newspapers that discussed the EU institutions did so in a neutral or informative manner, 35 per cent in a negative way and 24 per cent in a positive context.

Exploring Israel's perceptions and images of the EU: Summaries

The first Israeli perception that good relations with the EU are not critical to Israel is particularly noteworthy, since political relations with the EU are essential for the future of Israel. Not only does the Israeli economy and significant parts of its research and technology depend on cooperation with the EU, but the EU standing in global affairs and in security policies, not to mention its desire to be more involved in the southern Mediterranean, are likely to remain strong. Furthermore, the perceived difference in the Israeli attitude towards Washington and Brussels may lessen as the USA works more harmoniously with the EU on issues that are of vital concern to Israel, such as Iran's nuclear programme, the Syrian civil war and other regional crises.

An important feature in the perception of a foreign entity is its global strength (Castano *et al.*, 2003). For a meaningful upgrade of EU-Israeli relations, therefore, the EU would have to be perceived by Israel as a dominant and a relevant Other, and a key global power bordering on the Middle East which has a potentially constructive role to play in shaping the political-economic-cultural-strategic future of Israel. The role that the EU has chosen to play in defusing the Iranian nuclear crisis reflects

the EU's strength in the international arena and may help Israel to dispel its perception regarding the value of good political relations with Brussels.

It is easy to understand the general public's perception that the EU represents a hospitable framework for Israeli accession, and therefore that Israel could and should join the EU within the foreseeable future. This is probably the oldest Israeli perception towards the EU – as early as 1957, Israel started exploring the possibility of obtaining full EEC membership (Pardo, 2013b). Furthermore, the fact that Turkey (which Israelis consider to be their immediate neighbour) is in the midst of EU accession negotiations clearly contributes to this Israeli perception. Such a perception can best be explained by Israeli wishful thinking. Particularly surprising is the degree to which senior Israeli officials, as well as European leaders, policy-makers and others who are familiar with the EU, cling to this idea, because these views about 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 as an open and unified space without sharp distinctions between citizens of member states in terms of 'Insiders' and 'Others', on the other hand. However democratic Israel is, it is radically different from most other states. This difference would present great obstacles for Israeli accession to the EU even if Israel were invited to join. This difference would not be something that Israel could easily give up, since for many Israelis this difference underscores the very *raison d'être* of their country (Dror and Pardo, 2006).

From the EU's perspective, Israel is not regarded as a likely candidate for joining the EU in the foreseeable future. As the former EU Commissioner for Enlargement, Gunter Verheugen, put it in response to a question on full Israeli EU membership, 'It is impossible to determine today what the final borders of the unification will be... I cannot see what will come about in another 50 years.' At the same time, however, Verheugen advised Israelis against 'nurturing vain hopes' (Primor, 2004).

At the level of EU-Israeli relations, the Israeli perception that Israel can join the EU harms the future development and upgrading of the relationship. If anything, Israeli and European recognition that Israel cannot and should not try to become a member of the EU is a basic starting point for strengthening, developing and upgrading EU-Israeli relations further in the context of the ENP.

The Israeli perception that EU policies towards Israel are deeply rooted and rigid, and that the EU is an anti-Semitic power, will not be easy to

dispel. Indeed, prominent voices in the EU would seem to justify such thinking, feeding this Israeli perception. Thus, for instance, according to a 2013 survey on Jews' experiences and perceptions of anti-Semitism, commissioned by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), nearly a quarter of European Jews fear to openly identify as Jewish. More than 26 per cent of the respondents claim to have experienced anti-Semitic harassment at least once in the 12 months preceding the survey, and 34 per cent had experienced anti-Semitic harassment over the past five years (FRA, 2013).⁹

In December 2010, the former European Commissioner and ex-leader of Holland's ruling VVD party (Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie), Fritz Bolkestein, sparked a heated debate in the Netherlands by declaring that 'practicing Jews had no future here, and should emigrate to the US or Israel'. Bolkestein backed up his statement by saying that the increase in anti-Semitic incidents in Europe and in the Netherlands over the past decade had led him to have limited confidence in the ability of the Dutch government, or indeed other European governments, to fight anti-Semitism (Gerstenfeld, 2010, p. 109).

This study further finds that the vast majority of media representations of the EU in Israel's four leading newspapers during 2012 framed the EU as Israel's immediate neighbour and as an active political player in the international arena, acting internally and externally. But the EU is framed as a failed economic power and as an anti-Semitic entity.

It is interesting to point out that the EU's internal policies and members' domestic affairs and politics received the largest share of media attention – 59 per cent of all news items. The second most visible media framing of the EU was around the EU's foreign relations – 12 per cent of the news items.

Based on past research (Pardo, 2009), my initial assumption was that the Israeli media would clearly take a neutral to informative approach towards the EU. This study, however, reveals that in the aftermath of the Arab Spring and against the backdrop of the European sovereign debt crisis, Israel's four leading newspapers generally took a neutral or negative stance towards the EU and its members. In my analysis, the findings reflect the onset of the European sovereign debt crisis, the EU's reactions to the Arab Spring and the 2009 freeze of the EU–Israel upgrade of relations.

The media framing of the EU during 2012 did not differ from the perceptions and images of the Israeli public and political elites. In 2009 only 4 per cent of all news items presented the readers with a negative

position; in 2012 that figure increased tenfold to 40 per cent. At the same time, in 2009, 89 per cent of all news items were neutral; in 2012 that figure dropped to 42 per cent (Pardo, 2009; Pardo and Zydell, 2012).

Considering the EU's global economic role and its strong economic relations with Israel, and based on past findings, this study initially assumed that notwithstanding the European financial crisis, the Israeli media would frame the EU as a major economic power. However, media coverage of the EU in this context turned out to be extremely negative. The Israeli printed media framed the EU as a political power of weakness and as a passive and failed economic actor. It must be emphasized that in the eight years since my survey has existed, this was the first time that the Israeli printed media framed the EU as a failed economic power.

Another important connection between the public and elite perceptions and the results of the media analysis is the issue of anti-Semitism. The study finds that representations of the EU as an anti-Semitic power featured in 4 per cent of all news items. Ostensibly, that only 4 per cent of all news items made reference to anti-Semitism might suggest that the issue was a marginal one. However, the quantitative figure is misleading given that news items about anti-Semitism and the Holocaust often appear on the front pages of the Israeli dailies. Furthermore, a contextual analysis of these news items in the Israeli media indicates that anti-Semitism has a deeper and far more central role in shaping NPE's identity as an anti-Semitic power.

Discussion and conclusions

Although, in contrast with the Arab world, no popular unrest in Israel over the past two years has challenged NPE, Israelis' images and perceptions of the EU have continued to put the distinctiveness of the EU into question. Over this period, NPE deepened its political marginality and economic fragility for Israelis even as it strengthened its trade importance.

This chapter offers a detailed account of the overall assessment on the part of Israel of the EU's standing and actorness in the aftermath of the Arab Spring and in the midst of the European financial crisis. It does so by analysing three major Israeli perceptions of the EU. The first is that good political relations with the EU are not really essential for Israel. The second (and in some tension to the first) perception is that the EU represents a hospitable framework for Israeli accession and

therefore that Israel could and should join the EU within the foreseeable future. The third, which follows from the first and accentuates the tension with the second, is that anti-Israeli attitudes and geostrategic views that are detrimental to the security of Israel are deeply rooted in the EU. Underlying this perception are Israeli feelings that the EU is an anti-Semitic power.

These Israeli perceptions and images of the EU raise questions about Manners's claim that 'the EU as a normative power has an ontological quality to it' (2002, p. 252). If the quality were indeed ontological, one would expect to witness its manifestation also in Israelis' perceptions of the EU.

The fact that the EU is Israel's largest trading partner and has been actively involved in the MEPP for over 20 years, and at the same time the Israeli economy minister urges the government to end all cooperation with the EU, the Israeli prime minister declares that what Europe says is of no interest to him, and the general public perceive the EU as hostile to fundamental Israeli goals, leads to the conclusion that NPE is above all an inward-operating phenomenon rather than an external one. This suggests that NPE's major function is not to shape the perceptions and practices of non-EU countries, but is primarily an inward-operating mechanism that is deployed to consolidate the EU into a single entity. 'The self/other articulations of the "normative power Europe" concept, do not come from nowhere', as Diez (2005, p. 634) points out; 'Instead, they stand in a tradition (but also transform) the notion of a peace community whose primary other is its own, war-torn past' (see also Gordon and Pardo, 2013; Gordon and Pardo, forthcoming).

However problematic some of these perceptions and images might be, we should not lose sight of the fact that they play a critical role in EU-Israeli relations. If Israel wants a brighter future with the EU, it should make much more effort to understand, and in some cases even dispel, its perceptions and images of the EU. Indeed, it should heed the advice that Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, gave in February 1959 to Gideon Rafael, the country's first ambassador to the EEC, before sending him off to Brussels:

Israel must forge close links with [the European Communities]. 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.

(Rafael, 1981, p. 100)

Notes

1. One of the main crises in the southern Mediterranean countries has centred on migration. For an in-depth discussion about migration aspirations versus migration plans in Morocco, see Chapter 9.
2. The 2011 national survey was conducted by Panels Research Ltd in mid-June 2011. A representative sample of 1,057 people responded to the survey, with a 3.3 per cent margin of error. The 2013 national survey was carried out in April and May 2013, also by Panels Research Ltd, and it included a representative sample of 561 people with a margin of error of 4.3 per cent. Other countries/entities which the respondents to my 2013 survey preferred seeing involved in the MEPP included Canada (8 per cent), the UN (5 per cent), Russia (4 per cent) and NATO (2 per cent). (The surveys were made possible thanks to the financial assistance of the GIF).
3. The KAS and Pardo 2007 survey was conducted in February 2007 by Keevoon Communications. A representative sample of 511 people responded, with a margin of error of 4.5 per cent.
4. The KAS and Pardo 2009 survey was carried out in April 2009, also by Keevoon. A representative sample of 600 people responded, with a margin of error of 4.1 per cent.
5. The themes were education (37 per cent), economics and trade (6 per cent), social (15 per cent), culture (6 per cent), foreign relations (3 per cent), human rights (18 per cent), the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (3 per cent), media (3 per cent), Israeli Palestinian (Arab) citizens (6 per cent) and politics (3 per cent).
6. In a sample of eight prominent Israeli human rights organizations (of a total population of 40), four of which focus on securing rights inside Israel and four on protecting rights in the OT, Hila Zahavi found that European donors provided 87 per cent of all funding to human rights NGOs in Israel and 96 per cent of all funding to Israeli organizations working on OT issues (Zahavi, 2012).
7. *Haaretz* and *The Marker* target a narrow readership that is mostly associated with the centre-left of the Israeli ideological spectrum. *The Marker* is a daily economic newspaper distributed as a supplement to *Haaretz*, and since 2008 it has also been sold as a standalone daily newspaper. *Yedioth Ahronoth* targets a wider readership, associated mostly with the centre, while *Israel Hayom* targets the widest readership and is associated with the centre-right.
8. Being a daily economics newspaper, *The Marker* cited Greece more than any other EU member (17 per cent of news items).
9. The 2013 FRA survey was conducted among 5,100 Jews from eight EU member states, in which 90 per cent of the estimated Jewish population in the EU live.

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