

5 Between attraction and resistance

Israeli views of the European Union

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Introduction¹

Despite its growing power and importance, the European Union (EU) has not obtained a central place in Israeli political and social discourse. One of the reasons for this lack of centrality has to do with Israeli images and perceptions of the EU. These images and perceptions have driven Israel to behave more as if it were an island in the Atlantic Ocean rather than a Mediterranean country neighbouring the EU.

Historically, geographically and even religiously, it has been argued that 'Israel is from Europe, but not in Europe' (Diner 2007), and indeed the Union is Israel's economic, cultural and, in many respects, political hinterland. In this regard, a public statement made by Israel's former Foreign Minister, Tzipi Livni, is rather useful in order to understand the close connection between Europe and Israel: 'I truly believe that the road should ultimately lead us to a significant participation of Israel in the European integration project. And here the sky is the limit' (Livni 2006: 4).

This chapter explores some of the main images and perceptions of the EU in Israel. By providing empirical findings concerning the attitudes of Israeli public opinion, political elites, organized civil society and the press, this chapter offers insights into the overall assessment on the part of the Israelis of the EU's global actorness. At the same time, it also serves as an important indicator 'of how well intentions have been translated into observable actions' (Rhodes 1998: 6). The underlying assumption of this chapter is that only by understanding the various EU images and perceptions – and, in some cases, misperceptions – will the EU and Israel be able to improve and upgrade their relations.

A brief background

The EU and Israel first established diplomatic relations in 1959. In 1975 the then European Economic Community (EEC) and Israel signed their first cooperation agreement and, ever since, trade, economic, political and cultural cooperation have consolidated EU–Israel relations. The EU is Israel's most important trading partner. In 2007, 35 per cent of Israeli imports came from the EU, and 35 per

cent of Israeli exports were directed to the European market (both percentages exclude trade in diamonds). The EU ranks number one in Israel's imports and two in its exports. On the other hand, Israel is one of the Union's biggest trading partners in the Euro-Mediterranean area.

Israel is a full partner in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP)/Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and participates in all its programmes. To intensify their political, economic and technological-scientific relations, Israel and the EU signed the 'EU–Israel Association Agreement' in 1995 within the framework of the EMP. The agreement entered into force in 2000 and forms the legal basis for Israel–EU relations.

The EU is Israel's second biggest source of research funding, after the Israel Science Foundation. Moreover, Israel is the first non-European country fully associated with the EU's Framework Programmes for Research and Technological Development.

Following the launch of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in December 2004, the EU and Israel adopted the EU–Israel Action Plan. According to the Action Plan, Israel and the EU are to intensify political and security cooperation, introduce a significant element of economic integration, boost socio-cultural and scientific cooperation and share responsibility in conflict prevention and resolution. The ENP has acted as a catalyst in boosting Euro-Israeli relations and the Action Plan has provided the platform for developing EU–Israeli cooperation across various fields (Commission 2008).

In June 2008 the EU–Israel Association Council vowed to intensify EU–Israeli relations within the framework of the ENP, and it agreed to develop and upgrade these relations in three main areas: diplomatic cooperation, Israeli participation in European agencies, working groups and programmes and Israel's integration into the European Single Market (General Secretariat of the Council 2008). In December 2008, the EU External Relations Council reaffirmed its determination to upgrade bilateral relations and issued guidelines for strengthening the political dialogue structures with Israel (Council of the EU 2008: 2). However, after the Gaza war in January 2009 the upgrading process was de facto suspended.

Finally, in spite of the successful bilateral instruments, political relations between Israel and the EU have never fully recovered since the 1980 Venice Declaration in which, as Israel sees it, Europe clearly signalled its sympathy with the Arab side.² Ever since, the EU has been regarded as an anti-Israeli group of nations with an anti-Jewish history and sentiments.

An analysis of Israeli perceptions of the EU

Public opinion

Generally speaking, the Union's attitude towards Israel has been perceived as being quite hostile to this country's goals and vindications. Indeed, although the EU and its member states repeatedly state their commitment to the existence and

survival of Israel, they do not shy from criticizing Israel when it comes to its policies in the occupied territories. Arguably, these criticisms influence the way the EU is perceived in Israel, especially with regard to the peace process in the Middle East.

Public opinion polls seem to confirm this argument. In a 2007 national survey on the Israelis' attitudes towards the EU and its member states (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) and Pardo 2007), we found that 75 per cent of the respondents were of the opinion that the United States of America (USA) or the EU should be part of the peace process. Yet, when respondents were asked which of the two actors they would rather have involved, 69 per cent replied the USA while only a meagre 14 per cent argued in favour of EU involvement. Even more astonishing was the fact that 59 per cent of the respondents to the national survey thought that EU involvement in the region in recent years had prevented progress in the peace process (KAS and Pardo 2007: 16–17).³

A recent national survey from July 2008, which was commissioned by the Geneva Initiative,⁴ shows that 73 per cent of Israeli citizens support increasing US involvement in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. At the same time, the survey also shows a dramatic rise in public support for European involvement in the conflict (58 per cent).⁵ Interestingly, the Geneva survey employs the term 'European involvement' as opposed to 'EU involvement' (Geneva Initiative 2008).⁶

It is likely that Israelis understand that the Union's policies towards the conflict in the Middle East reflect the EU's increasing role in global affairs. In other words, Israelis recognize that the recent involvement of the EU in the Middle East and, in particular, the Union's contributions to finding a solution to the Israeli–Arab conflict mirror the EU's emerging standing in the international arena. Both the EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM), which monitored the operations of the Rafah border crossing point (until Hamas took over the Gaza Strip in June 2007), and member states' military involvement in the United Nations (UN) Interim Force in southern Lebanon (following the 2006 war between Israel and Hizbullah) are testimonies to the Union's growing involvement in the Middle East in the field of security. These two missions marked a significant step forwards for EU–Israeli relations, especially since they marked an important recognition by Israel that the EU will be given responsibility in the 'hard security' sphere.

The EU's standing with regard to the peace process cannot be understood without a deeper appreciation of the most dominant Israeli perceptions of the EU. Currently, three major perceptions, widely shared by both the general public and the political elites, affect Israeli attitudes towards the EU and influence Israeli policies vis-à-vis the Union.

The most fundamental Israeli perception of the EU is that the Union represents a hospitable framework for Israeli accession, and therefore that Israel could and should join the EU within the foreseeable future. This perception is driven by the Israelis' desires to join the Union.

In a 2004 Dahaf survey of the Israelis' perceptions of the EU, 70 per cent of those surveyed thought that joining the EU was either very important or

important (Dahaf Institute 2004).⁷ In the 2007 KAS and Pardo national survey, an overwhelming majority of 75 per cent of the Israeli public generally supported the possibility of Israel joining the EU. In addition, following the EU enlargement in January 2007, about 42 per cent of Israeli citizens are now eligible for EU citizenship (KAS and Pardo 2007: 20).

An additional perception, which might appear to contradict the first one, is that relations with the USA are by far more crucial than relations with the EU. In the 2004 survey, 68 per cent of respondents considered relations with the USA as more important than relations with the EU. Only 6 per cent considered relations with the EU as more important. About one-quarter thought that both relations were equally important (Dahaf Institute 2004: 24). Furthermore, 69 per cent of the respondents to the 2007 survey maintained that they had more in common with Americans than with Europeans, particularly in terms of culture. Only 20 per cent of the respondents felt they had more in common with Europeans than with Americans (KAS and Pardo 2007: 17).

The third fundamental perception follows from the second and accentuates the tension with the first: the EU harbours deep-rooted anti-Israeli attitudes and geo-strategic views that are detrimental to the security of this country. Underlying this perception are Israeli feelings that large parts of the EU are anti-Semitic. The 2007 KAS and Pardo survey revealed that 78 per cent of those surveyed thought that the EU was not doing enough to prevent anti-Semitism in Europe (KAS and Pardo 2007: 18).⁸ Likewise, 64 per cent of the respondents to the 2004 Dahaf survey agreed with the claim that the EU positions towards Israel were anti-Semitism thinly disguised as moral principles (Dahaf Institute 2004: 41).

Political elites and organized civil society

At the political level, a number of Israeli leaders agree with the citizens' opinion that Israel could and should join the EU within the foreseeable future. Thus, for instance, a group of Israeli parliamentarians, representing a broad spectrum of Israel's political parties, signed a manifesto in 2002 advocating Israeli membership of the EU (Transnational Radical Party 2002).⁹ In November 2002, former Israeli Foreign Minister and current Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, declared that Israel favours joining the EU and asked Italy to help Israel achieve this goal.¹⁰ Likewise, former Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom stated in May 2003 that the Israeli government was weighing up the possibility of applying for EU membership, adding that 'we will be glad to be accepted by the EU'.¹¹ In January 2007, Avigdor Liberman, current Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, declared that 'Israel's diplomatic and security goal ... must be clear: joining NATO and entering the EU'.¹²

A different approach is taken by Israel's President, Shimon Peres, who believes that once Israelis and Palestinians sign a peace agreement 'they should be accepted, together with Jordan, as members of a united Europe', in which the

three countries could form a trading partnership or 'a modern Benelux'. According to Peres such a membership 'will give hope to the three parties'.¹³

It is worth noting that some leaders in the EU also support the idea of Israel becoming a member of the EU. For instance, Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi has been a vociferous advocate of Israel's accession to the EU, especially during the 2003 Italian Presidency of the EU. In 2004 Berlusconi declared that 'Italy will support Israeli membership of the EU ... 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'.¹⁴ Israel is a natural candidate for EU membership also for French President Nicolas Sarkozy – or at least more natural than Turkey. As Sarkozy wrote in his election campaign book, 'if Turkey entered the EU, I also wonder on what basis we could exclude Israel, so many of whose citizens are at home in France and in Europe, and vice versa' (Sarkozy 2007: 148). Support for Israeli accession to the EU can also be heard in the European Parliament. The Transnational Radical Party, for instance, has been running a campaign for full Israeli membership of the EU for several years (Transnational Radical Party 2002).

Although Israeli policy makers are aware of the importance of the EU to Israel, many of them share the public's perception that relations with the USA are by far more crucial than relations with the EU. In a statement that hyperbolically reflects the Israeli dismissal of the EU, former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon told a group of Israeli ambassadors to Europe they could disregard criticism of European governments since we in Israel 'do not owe anyone [i.e. the Europeans] anything. We are obligated only to God!'¹⁵ For Sharon, as for others in the Israeli political elites, Israel can dismiss the EU mainly because of Israel's special relationship with the US.

Israeli political elites also share the general public's perception that EU policies towards Israel are deeply rooted in and marked by anti-Semitism. In the last eight years, European anti-Semitism has been discussed several times by the Israeli government in its weekly meetings. In press statements issued by Israeli politicians following meetings with European officials, the topic of European anti-Semitism is regularly on the Israeli political agenda. This is invariably the case when it comes to Israel's Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers.

In November 2003 in an interview with EUpolitix.com, former Prime Minister Sharon said:

an ever stronger Muslim presence in Europe is certainly endangering the life of Jewish people ... I would say.... EU governments are not doing enough to tackle anti-Semitism ... the majority of countries in Europe do not have a balanced policy towards Israel'.¹⁶

Later on in 2004 Prime Minister Sharon warned the Israeli Knesset that 'the anti-Semitism virus woke again [in Europe] and is beginning to infect large parts of the continent'.¹⁷ In mid 2004, Prime Minister Sharon told a meeting of the American Jewish Association that Jews around the world, and especially French

Jews, should relocate to Israel as early as possible, because of 'the spread of the wildest [European] anti-Semitism'.¹⁸ Also for former Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, 'anti-Semitism is still very much alive [in Europe]'. In February 2007, Livni stated that 'modern anti-Semitism is spreading from fringes to the mainstream, in parallel with the growth of radical Islamic ideology in Europe. It poses a significant threat. We are witnessing new types of cooperation in Europe between the racist right, radical left and the Jihadist Muslims in this campaign.' (Livni 2007: 2).

The fight against anti-Semitism in Europe is also included in the EU–Israel Action Plan (AP) and is part of the December 2008 EU Council guidelines for strengthening political dialogue with Israel. While several chapters and sections of the AP include references to anti-Semitism, the AP's section on 'shared values' contains a special subsection on 'combating anti-Semitism' in which both parties commit themselves to the struggle against all forms of anti-Semitism in Europe. Moreover, the EU Council's guidelines replace the informal working group on human rights with a formal subcommittee, which will also examine 'the fight against racism and xenophobia – including islamophobia and antisemitism' (Council of the EU 2008: 5).

At the level of organized civil society, the images and perceptions of the EU are somewhat different. In analysing Israel's civil society, we conducted a study of 100 websites of major Israeli trade unions, academic institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).¹⁹ An additional component of this analysis consists of face-to-face interviews with 20 representatives of Israel's leading trade unions, academic institutions and NGOs.

A total of 30 per cent of the organizations surveyed made some kind of reference to the EU/Europe in their websites. Of these, 5 per cent of the organizations made a reference on their home page and 25 per cent of them referred to the EU/Europe on other pages of their websites. Two per cent of the organizations included a picture of the EU flag in their websites. In the sites mentioning the EU/Europe, we counted 134 items and links referring to the EU and 749 items and links referring to Europe. We then catalogued all items and links under 11 themes. The results are summarized in Table 5.1.

In terms of face value, an overall amount of 30 per cent of organizations making reference to the EU/Europe in their websites represents a quite significant quantitative measure. However, a qualitative analysis of these references highlights a far less central role for the EU/Europe than the merely quantitative figure suggests.²⁰

That said, it is important to emphasize that the Israeli civil society is not unified in its approach to the EU. It is possible to divide Israeli civil society organizations into three categories: organizations that are not concerned with the EU and for whose work the Union has no direct relevance, organizations that know that the EU can assist them but are not part of the group of organizations that enjoy the Union's financial support and organizations that enjoy the EU's financial support. This third group includes leftist and liberal civil society organizations that see the EU as a potential political, ideological and financial partner.

Table 5.1 Distribution of items and links to the EU/Europe by theme in 100 Israeli civil society organizations' websites (March–April 2008)

Theme	Percentage
Human rights	25
Professional cooperation	12
Social	12
Health	9
Education	9
Economy and trade	9
Financial support	9
Middle East peace process	6
EU–Israel political relations	3
Environment	3
Legal	3
Total	100

Source: Pardo *et al.* 2008.

They believe the EU respects the work of civil society, even when the activities of these organizations might be at odds with the policies of the Israeli government. As the director of one Israeli NGO explained, the EU exemplifies 'how a democratic system should behave' (Pardo and Eskenazi 2008, Interview no. 7: 3). Not surprisingly, these organizations perceive the EU as the global defender of human rights and as an independent global power.

Most of Israeli civil society organizations are financially dependent on foreign financial sources. The USA is thought to be the largest financial supporter of Israel's organized civil society. Nevertheless, it is important to note that most of the financial support does not come directly from the US government but rather from the Jewish communities in North America. Echoing the implicit political fault lines between American and European interests, some civil society organizations funded by the EU (particularly, those working on Israeli–Palestinian/Arab issues) maintain they 'feel better with funds that come from the EU rather than from rightist organizations in America' (Pardo and Eskenazi 2008, Interview no. 14: 5).

Unlike other sectors in Israel, organized civil society does not perceive the EU as an anti-Semitic entity. Most organizations report they have never faced any anti-Semitic behaviour. Yet all organizations report that the issue is not on their agenda. Most organizations would like Israel to strengthen relations with the EU. Some of them would even like to see Israel as a full member of the EU. According to the director general of one of the largest Israeli civil society organizations:

if Israel were to join the EU, Israel would finally be a member of a family of nations that believe in human rights and in equality; a family of nations that fight for the protection of the environment. It is not that Europe is a perfect

place, but the European society is an enlightened society. Israeli EU membership will release us from our historical siege.

(Pardo and Eskenazi 2008, Interview no. 16: 4)

Israeli media

Although press circulation is currently in decline worldwide, leading newspapers are still considered a major source of information for the general public, as well as for the country's elite and opinion leaders. Newspapers play a decisive role in shaping collective perceptions and influencing the character of international relations (Schulz 2001: 4). Here, a study of the three leading national Hebrew newspapers, *Haaretz*, *Yedioth Ahronoth* and *Maariv*, is summarized. These three newspapers cover the Israeli ideological spectrum from left to right. While *Haaretz* targets a narrow readership mostly associated with the left, *Yedioth Ahronoth* and *Maariv* target a wider readership mostly associated with the centre and right of the Israeli ideological spectrum. They are the most widely read newspapers in Israel. The analysis spans all news items in the printed editions between 1 October 2007 and 31 March 2008.²¹ We used a simple matrix to catalogue each news item according to the position it related and whether the context was positive, negative, neutral or a simple presentation of general information.²² We also checked to see whether it concerned Israel, Jewish communities/the Holocaust/anti-Semitism, foreign affairs, the economy, security, culture, gossip or immigration. The results are summarized in Tables 5.2 to 5.4.

The number of news items relating to the EU and its member states varied greatly across Israel's three leading newspapers. *Haaretz* published 63.4 per cent of all news items, while *Maariv* published 25.4 per cent and *Yedioth Ahronoth* the remaining 11 per cent. In terms of the contents of the news, it is interesting to note that most items were covered selectively by one or the other newspapers. Only a minority of topics cut across the three newspapers, including the October 2007 general elections in Poland, the French proposal to appoint former British Prime Minister Tony Blair to the presidency of the European Council, the

Table 5.2 Press coverage of the EU in Israel's three leading newspapers (October 2007 to March 2008)

Month	<i>Haaretz</i>	<i>Yedioth Ahronoth</i>	<i>Maariv</i>	Total
October 2007	71	14	46	131
November 2007	86	14	51	151
December 2007	88	15	44	147
January 2008	92	16	15	123
February 2008	84	10	28	122
March 2008	100	22	25	147
Total	521	91	209	821
Average per month	86	15	34	

Source: Pardo *et al.* 2008.

Table 5.3 Coverage of the EU/Europe and EU member states in Israel's three leading newspapers by theme (October 2007–March 2008)

EU/Europe/member state	Theme									
	Israel	Jewish communities, holocaust, anti-Semitism	External affairs (excluding Israel)	Internal affairs	Economy	Security	Culture	Immigration	Gossip	
EU/Europe	10	3	34	24	17	7	3	7	0	
France	22	21	57	63	1	13	16	10	52	
Germany	30	40	17	20	0	9	4	7	0	
UK	10	10	17	39	2	4	8	2	12	
Italy	1	2	1	44	1	1	5	3	0	
Poland	2	10	4	15	0	3	0	0	0	
Other EU member states	11	21	8	75	4	4	6	25	2	
Total	86	107	138	280	25	41	42	54	66	

Source: Pardo *et al.* 2008.

December 2007 visit of Muammar Gaddafi to Paris, the collapse of the Italian government in January 2008 and the Spanish general elections of March 2008. Although the Treaty of Lisbon was signed during the period examined, this event attracted little attention in the three newspapers.

Out of the 27 EU member states, France was mentioned the most often by the Israeli newspapers. One may think that the focus on France stems from rapprochement in French–Israeli relations. Be that as it may, the contents were less political than personal. While 36 per cent and 38 per cent of the news items published in *Yedioth Ahronoth* and *Maariv* (respectively) focused on France, the majority of them were dedicated to pure gossip regarding the personal life of President Sarkozy. *Haaretz*, too, focused on France more than on any other EU member state during the said period (25 per cent of the news items), but most of these items covered French foreign and domestic affairs (30.5 and 27.4 per cent, respectively).

Next to France, Germany received the most attention in Israel's three leading newspapers, with 14.7 per cent of all news items referring to Germany. In *Yedioth Ahronoth* 90 per cent of the news items on Germany also related to Israel, the European Jewish communities, the Holocaust or European anti-Semitism. In *Haaretz*, 57 per cent of the news items did so, and in *Maariv* 48 per cent mentioned Germany in one of these contexts.²³

The EU as a global power

In February to March 2008 we conducted a survey on the dominant powers of the twenty-first century and the most important goals of international politics. Survey respondents were selected among Israeli politicians, decision makers and opinion leaders; key representatives of Israel's leading trade unions, academic institutions and NGOs; and journalists from major Israeli newspapers, television channels and radio programmes.

The interviewees place both the EU and France together in fourth place on the list of global superpowers after the USA, China, Russia and Germany. Nevertheless, they expect the EU to move up to third place in the future (by 2020). According to the survey's respondents, among the greatest challenges facing the world's superpowers are climate change, international terrorism and poverty. Consequently, protection of the environment, peacekeeping and the eradication of poverty should be the top goals of any superpower.

About 50 per cent of our interviewees were of the opinion that the USA is the best country to maintain peace and stability in the world. On the other hand, 33 per cent believed that the EU is the best champion of world peace (as opposed to the USA).

Understanding Israeli perceptions of the EU

Public opinion and the political elites' perceptions

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. Yet, such a perception can best be explained by Israeli wishful thinking. What is 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 on to this idea. For these views on Israeli accession to 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 the citizens of member states in terms of 'insiders' and 'others', on the other hand. However democratic and liberal Israel might be, Israel's reality and aspirations as a Jewish state and the state of the Jewish People make it exceptional and radically different from other states. Needless to say, this difference would present great obstacles for Israeli accession to the EU even if Israel were invited to join the Union. Yet this difference would not be something that Israel could easily give up, since for many Israelis this distinction underscores their country's very *raison d'être*. At the EU level, indeed, public officials do not even seem to consider the possibility of Israel entering the EU. As explained by Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner: 'In the context of the [ENP] we still have a lot of work to bring Israel and the EU closer ... As for the question of [Israel's] EU membership – this question is not on the agenda.'²⁴

It is possible that fuelling the expectations that Israel might become a member of the EU will harm the future development of the relationship. Indeed, Israeli and European recognition that Israel cannot and should not try to become a member of the EU, in distinction from deep and comprehensive cooperation agreements,²⁵ is a basic starting point for strengthening, developing and upgrading EU–Israeli relations.

The second Israeli perception that relations with the USA are by far more crucial than relations with the EU is also likely to have a negative impact on the country, since political relations with the EU are indeed quite crucial 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 security policies, not to mention its desire to be more involved in the Middle East, are likely to remain strong. As the EU's Security Strategy fully clarifies: '[The] resolution of the Arab/Israeli conflict is a strategic priority for Europe ... The [EU] must remain engaged and ready to commit resources to the problem until it is solved' (Council of the EU 2003: 8).

Furthermore, the different treatment Israel reserves for Washington as opposed to Brussels is itself problematic, mainly due to the fact that the USA and the EU are increasingly working together, especially on the Middle East. The Middle East Quartet made up of the USA, EU, Russia and the UN has

become the principal international framework to deal with the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

For a meaningful upgrade of EU–Israeli relations the Union must be recognized by Israel as a major global actor bordering on the Middle East that has a potentially constructive role to play in shaping the political–economic–cultural–strategic future of Israel. Europe would certainly like to assume a key role in the international arena, as was clearly declared by the EU's Security Strategy (Council of the EU 2003: 14). The role that the EU has chosen to play in the Lebanese crisis following the 2006 war and in defusing the Iranian nuclear crisis may prove that the EU is committed to its international role and may help Israel dispel its own perception with regard to the value of good political relations with Brussels.

The Israeli perception that EU policies towards Israel are deeply rooted and that large parts of the EU are anti-Semitic will not be easy to put to flight, especially when institutional voices within the EU approve such thinking, feeding this Israeli perception. A case in point is a speech given in 2008 by Franco Frattini, former Vice-President of the European Commission and the current Italian Foreign Minister, who admitted that in the past 'the EU has on some occasions taken an unbalanced stance towards Israel, even by making an unacceptable confusion between legitimate political criticism of Israel and intolerance against Jewish people that can become anti-Semitism'.²⁶

All the respondents interviewed for this study identified Europe's Muslims as a main source of the current rise of anti-Semitism in Europe. For them, in combination with growing Islamic populations in EU member states and some features of globalization, the results were radical versions of European anti-Semitism fused with anti-Zionism, anti-Israelism and anti-Americanism. All interviewees concluded that these culminated in the manifestation of a 'new' European anti-Semitism superimposed on the traditional core of European anti-Semitism.

Media perceptions

An initial assumption of this study was that the image of the Union in the Israeli media would be significantly dominated by Israeli, European Jewish communities/anti-Semitism and economic themes. Moreover, it was assumed that the Israeli media would frame the EU as an 'economic power', as 'a political power of weakness' and as an anti-Jewish entity. Yet the first two parts of this assumption proved to be wrong. The analysis found that the majority of EU representations in the press described the EU as 'a powerful political system', sometimes even 'a power of passive aggression' (Leonard 2005: 49–56), acting internally and externally. However, the Union was also framed as a marginal economic power with an anti-Jewish character.

It is interesting to point out that the EU's internal policies and the member states' domestic affairs received the largest share of media attention – 34 per cent of all news items (Table 5.3). The second most visible media framing of the

EU was around the Union's external affairs – 16.8 per cent of the sampled news items.

Our analysis also revealed that Israel's three leading newspapers took a neutral or positive stance on the Union. In 89 per cent of all sampled news items the media presented the Israeli readers with a neutral position and in 7 per cent of all sampled news items the media presented its readers with a positive position. In only 4 per cent of the items did the Israeli media clearly take a negative position (Table 5.4). In spite of the EU's global economic role and the well-developed economic relations between Israel and the EU, media coverage of the EU as an economic actor turned out to be marginal. During the period under scrutiny, only 3 per cent of the news items focused on this theme.

The most evident connection between the findings concerning public opinion and political elites and the results of the media analysis is the issue of anti-Semitism. Our study found that representations of the EU as an anti-Jewish and maybe even an anti-Semitic entity received the third largest share of media attention – 13 per cent of all news items. These figures are troubling, and go against a positive trend across the EU. As reports commissioned by the EU's Agency for Fundamental Rights on the issue of anti-Semitism in the EU since 2002 reveal, the number of violent anti-Semitic acts in the EU grew dramatically between 2002 and 2004, decreasing thereafter until the war in Gaza in 2009. Despite this downward trend, this study shows that Israel's three leading newspapers framed the Union as an entity with an anti-Jewish bias.

In an attempt to explain the frequency of news items regarding the Holocaust and European anti-Semitism, some foreign news editors interviewed for our research conceded that the decision to report extensively on anti-Semitic incidents in Europe and on the Holocaust was 'simply because anti-Semitism and the Holocaust sell newspapers in Israel' (Eskenazi and Pardo 2008, Interviews nos 1–2). And indeed quite often news items on anti-Semitism and the Holocaust reach the front pages of the Israeli dailies. Notwithstanding this anti-

Table 5.4 Number of times the EU/Europe and EU member states are mentioned in Israel's three leading newspapers (October 2007 to March 2008)

EU/Europe/Member State	Evaluation				
	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Informative	Total
EU/Europe	9	2	35	47	93
France	15	7	70	148	240
Germany	12	8	34	67	121
UK	6	0	38	69	113
Italy	3	4	28	22	57
Poland	7	2	10	17	36
Other EU member states	7	6	56	91	160
Total	59	29	271	461	

Source: Pardo *et al.* 2008.

Semitic image, the Union and its member states are also portrayed as possessing democratic values and as advocating human rights. The EU is also viewed as a leading donor of international aid and an active negotiator in the Iranian nuclear crisis.

Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter identifies and analyses three major perceptions held by Israelis about the EU. First, that the Union represents a hospitable framework for Israeli accession, which makes people believe Israel could and should join the EU within the foreseeable future. This perception is mainly driven by the Israelis' desires to join the Union. Apparently at odds with the first perception is the belief that good political relations with the EU are by far less crucial than relations with the USA, particularly when it comes to the peace process in the Middle East. The third fundamental perception, which follows from the second and accentuates the tension with the first, is that anti-Israeli attitudes and geo-strategic views detrimental to the security of Israel are deeply rooted in the EU. Underlying this perception are Israeli feelings that large parts of the EU are anti-Semitic.

However problematic some of these perceptions and images might be, it is crucial to bear in mind that they are likely to affect relations between Israel and the EU and how the interaction between these two partners plays itself out. If Israel wants to continue developing and upgrading its relations with the EU, however, it should make much more of an effort to understand, and in some cases even dispel, its (mis-) perceptions and images of the EU. The same responsibility lies, of course, also on the European side. While this chapter did not examine European perceptions and images of Israel, there is no reason to think that they deserve any less attention. As François Duchêne has already cautioned us: 'Israel can never be wholly foreign to ... Europeans ... Jews are so much part of the fabric of European history and contemporary life that relations with Israel must, in some sense, be an extension of folk memories on both sides' (Duchêne 1988: 11). And without understanding these memories, it will be difficult to address the (mis-) perceptions and images on which the future of EU–Israeli relations ultimately lies.

There is little advantage in improving images and relations with actors who do not have assets that can benefit the EU. However, this is not the case for Israel in its relations with the EU. The main strategic assets of Israel are both positive, in the sense of benefiting the EU, and negative in the sense of being capable at least of somewhat harming the EU. These are outlined below (Dror and Pardo 2006: 24–8).

- 1 Israel's ability to influence the Union's role in Middle Eastern affairs, which in turn has an impact on the Union's global and regional standing.
- 2 Israel's ability to offer help and advice to EU decision makers to understand better the Middle East.

- 3 Israel's assistance with intelligence in coping with terror against targets in the EU.
- 4 Israel's hard-power spare capacity to help protect essential EU interests in the case of serious ruptures.
- 5 Israel's significant buying capacity.
- 6 Israel's possibility to direct scientific and technological cooperation either to the EU or to other partners.
- 7 Israel's capacity to influence the soft power of the US Jewish community and its actions with respect to EU-US relations.
- 8 Israel's potential ability, if pushed into a dangerous corner, to 'throw surprises at history' and cause changes in the Middle East, which might influence the EU.

In view of the analysis presented in this chapter, therefore, the following 12 recommendations are tentatively proposed (Dror and Pardo 2006: 43-4):

- 1 To realize the crucial importance of EU-Israeli relations.
- 2 To recognize and explicate shared long-term interests.
- 3 To recognize and officially declare that Israel shall not become a full member of the Union.
- 4 To give high priority to improving EU-Israeli relations, including investing larger resources and avoiding unessential acts.
- 5 To understand better Israeli values, interests and worldviews.
- 6 To move from a debate on current issues to a clarification of fundamental disagreements.
- 7 To examine and confront EU-based Israeli images and perceptions.
- 8 To strive to cooperate on global issues.
- 9 To map shared strategic interests and offer more cooperation in advancing mutual objectives.
- 10 To initiate shared professional discourse on the long-range future of the Middle East and on global geo-strategy as a whole.
- 11 To consult Israel formally on major local and regional initiatives.
- 12 To strengthen the socio-cultural policy dimension of EU-Israel relations.

Notes

- 1 This chapter is a condensed version of a study conducted under the Network of Excellence *Global Governance, Regionalisation and Regulation: the Role of the EU - GARNET*. Some sections of this chapter draw on an article co-authored with Yehezkel Dror, which was published in the *European Foreign Affairs Review* (Dror and Pardo 2006). I am grateful to Sonia Lucarelli and Lorenzo Fioramonti for their constructive suggestions and comments at different stages of this study. I would also like to express my gratitude for the invaluable assistance of Michal Eskenazi and Ayal Kantz.
- 2 The central parts of the Venice Declaration discuss: (i) the 'Palestinian problem', (ii) the 'question of Jerusalem' and (iii) the Israeli settlements.
- 3 The KAS and Pardo survey was carried out in February 2007, by KEEVOON

- Research, Strategy and Communications. A total of 511 people, providing a representative sample of Israel's adult population, responded to the survey. The survey had a 4.5 per cent margin of error.
- 4 The Geneva Initiative is a joint Israeli-Palestinian effort that suggests a detailed model for a peace agreement to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- 5 The GI survey was conducted by the Market Watch Research Institute in July 2008. A total of 600 respondents were polled by phone and the survey had a margin of error of around 4 per cent.
- 6 The GI is also supported by European funds, mainly from the Swiss government.
- 7 The 2004 Dahaf survey was commissioned by the European Commission's Delegation to Israel and conducted by the Dahaf Institute in December 2003 and February 2004. A total of 997 people, providing a representative sample of Israel's adult population, responded to the survey.
- 8 In addition, 64 per cent of Israelis thought that the EU is not doing enough to prevent Islamophobia (KAS and Pardo 2007: 19).
- 9 Of course, this is not to suggest that, should there be a vote on EU membership, the Israeli parliament would approve it.
- 10 'Israel Should Join the European Union', *Galatz-IDF Radio*, 9 November 2002.
- 11 'Analysis: Israel weighing EU membership', *United Press International*, 21 May 2003.
- 12 'Avigdor Liberman: Israel should press to join NATO, EU', *Haaretz*, 1 January 2007.
- 13 'EU Membership Touted for Israel, Palestine, Jordan', *CBC News*, 11 February 2004.
- 14 'Berlusconi: Italy will support Israeli EU membership', *Globes*, 3 October 2004.
- 15 'An Advocacy Lesson: at a Jerusalem conference Sharon demanded from the ambassadors to Europe: do not be afraid of anyone', *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 29 December 2004.
- 16 'European Report on Anti-Semitism Shelved due to "Political" Reasons', *Israel-insider*, 24 November 2003.
- 17 'Sharon: anti-Semitism in Europe has reached new levels after the Holocaust', *Ynet*, 27 January 2004.
- 18 'French Jews Must Move to Israel', *BBC News*, 18 July 2004.
- 19 The following types of organizations were surveyed: eight professional organizations and 92 academic, civil and communal organizations. The Internet search was conducted in March to April 2008 and was based on a search for the terms 'European Union' and 'Europe'.
- 20 In most cases the websites contain a mere reference to the 'EU' or 'Europe'.
- 21 The analysis is based on all news items in which any of the names of the 27 EU member states or the terms 'EU' and/or 'Europe' were mentioned in the headline or in the sub-headline, either in a value-laden context or used in a descriptive, factual manner.
- 22 Note that some of the articles were checked twice as they both presented the reader with general information and in a positive context for example.
- 23 The 2007 KAS and Pardo survey also reveals that Germany has a very favourable image among Israelis, with 67 per cent of those surveyed expressing their wish to see a more dominant Germany within the EU (KAS and Pardo 2007: 35).
- 24 'We Will Take Advantage of the Improvement of Relations with the US for a Deeper Involvement of the EU in the Peace Process', *Haaretz*, 8 February 2005.
- 25 For a discussion on a new model for Euro-Israeli relations, see Pardo 2008.
- 26 'Italian FM: EU biased against Israel', *Haaretz*, 19 June 2008.

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6 Conflict and hope

The EU in the eyes of Palestine

Simona Santoro and Rami Nasrallah

Be sure that Europe does not forget you; we will never let you down. The agreement I just signed is a clear sign that we are and will be supporting Palestinian refugees. The EU has no other agenda than to help build sustainable peace and prosperity.¹

(Louis Michel, Gaza, November 2005)

Introduction

At the roots of EU–Palestinian relations is a clear-cut interest in cooperation. The EU has declared stability in the Middle East as one of its priorities and makes no secret of its desire for a more active role in the efforts to resolve the Israeli–Palestinian conflict (Solana 2003). The Palestinians are heavily dependent on the EU's financial assistance and would welcome an intensified diplomatic role for the Union, which is broadly considered more favourable to the Palestinian negotiating position than the United States of America (USA).²

However, despite this context, the Palestinian image of the EU is far from being straightforward. An analysis of the views held by Palestinian elites, public opinion and the media highlights a mixed picture. In the following pages, this chapter will provide a description of these perceptions and will attempt to identify key factors leading to them.

Before proceeding, it is important briefly to refer to the framework in which the Palestinian perceptions of the EU are developed. First, Palestinian politics and life have been absorbed almost completely by the conflict with Israel and the struggle to establish a state. Statelessness and hence statehood are existential issues.³ Palestine is also a constitutive element of national identity for all Palestinians. In the last two decades, the focus has been on the Oslo Process and negotiations with Israel.⁴ Embarking on the peace process meant abandoning a decades-long armed struggle and accepting a phased settlement aimed at establishing a Palestinian state.

Second, the establishment of the Oslo Process and the Palestinian Authority (PA) in the West Bank and Gaza at the beginning of the 1990s was followed by the demise of the 'political, institutional and security framework' (Sayigh 2002)

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