

# *The EU through Israeli Eyes*

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## *Main Goal*

By providing empirical findings concerning the attitudes towards the EU of the Israeli public, the political elites the organised civil society and the press, the study analyses some of the main perceptions in Israel of the EU and offers insights into how the EU is actually judged as an international actor by Israelis.

Only by understanding these perceptions, and in some cases only by dispelling them, Israel will be able to improve its relations with the EU, and Israeli-EU relations will fulfill their potential.

# A New Israeli Flag???



## *Public Opinion*

### *Perception #1: Israeli Membership in the EU (I)*

The EU represents a hospitable framework for Israeli accession, and therefore that Israel could and should join the EU within the foreseeable future.

In 2004, 70 percent of the Israelis thought that joining the EU is either very important or important.

Importance attributed to Israel joining the EU [Dahaf (2004: 60)]

	Entire sample	Jews	Immigrants	Arabs
Very important	44	44	27	43
Important	26	25	45	34
Somewhat important	14	15	16	10
Not very important	9	10	9	5
Not important	2	2	2	5
Not important at all	4	4	1	3
Don't Know	1	--	--	--
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

## *Public Opinion*

### *Perception #1: Israeli Membership in the EU (II)*

In February 2007, an overwhelming majority of 75 percent of the Israeli public either strongly supported, somewhat supported or tended to support the idea that Israel should join the EU.

**Degree of support for Israel joining the EU [KAS and Pardo (2007: 11)]**

	Entire sample	Jews	Immigrants	Arabs
Strongly Support	32	32	27	35
Somewhat Support	16	17	10	12
Support	27	28	33	20
Oppose	9	8	7	19
Somewhat Oppose	4	4	10	6
Strongly Oppose	5	6	7	1
Don't Know/ Refused	7	5	6	7
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

# 42 percent of Jewish Israelis are Identified as Eligible for EU Citizenship

Of the 42% who are Eligible for EU Citizenship, they are from.....

• Poland	50%
• Romania	15%
• Germany	10%
• Hungary	9%
• Bulgaria	6%
• Greece	6%
• Lithuania	6%
• Czech Republic	4%
• France	4%
• Austria	3%
• Italy	2%
• Spain	2%
• Slovakia	2%
• Belgium	1%
• UK	1%
• Latvia	1%
• Slovenia	1%

## *Political Elites*

### *Perception #1: Israeli Membership in the EU (I)* *Israeli Leaders Support Israeli EU Membership*

Former PM and FM Benjamin Netanyahu: “Israel favors joining the EU and asked Italy to help in achieving this goal” (2002);

Former FM Silvan Shalom: “The Israeli government was weighing the possibility of applying for EU membership ... We will be glad to be accepted by the EU” (2003);

Former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Strategic Affairs Avigdor Liberman: "Israel's diplomatic and security goal ... must be clear: joining NATO and entering the European Union“ (2007);

Israeli President Shimon Peres: “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’“(2004).

## *Political Elites*

### *Perception #1: Israeli Membership in the EU (II)*

#### *European Leaders Support Israeli EU Membership*

Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi: "Italy will support Israeli membership in 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" (2004);

French President Nicolas Sarkozy: "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" (2007).



# SIGN HERE THE APPEAL FOR ISRAEL IN THE EUROPEAN UNION



ISRAEL IN THE EUROPEAN UNION **NOW!**

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As of September 01, 2007, **7524** people have  
SIGNED THE APPEAL

## FOR ISRAEL IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

We the undersigned signatories to this appeal resolve as follows:

### SOME OF THE SIGNATORIES

Galina **ACKERMAN** journaliste (France)  
Ada **AHARONI** writer (Israel)  
Colette **AVITAL** Member of the Knesset - Labour (Israel)  
Roman **BRONFMAN** Member of the Knesset - Democratic Choice (Israel)  
Marco **CAPPATO** MEl\*, radical (Italy)  
Raymond **COHEN** University Professor (Israel)  
Betty **DAN** directrice d'information Radio Judaïca Belgique (Belgium)  
Marc **DAUGHERTY** Journalist (Israel)  
Benedetto **DELLA VEDOVA** MEl\*, radical (Italy)  
Gianfranco **DELL'ALBA** MFP, radical (Italy)  
Olivier **DUPUIS** MEl\*, radical (Belgium)  
Michael **EITAN** Member of the Knesset - Likud (Israel)  
Akiva **ELDAR** Journalist (Israel)  
Gilles William **GOLDNADEL** sexual (France)  
Massimiliano **JANOWSKI** Consigliere provinciale AN (Italy)  
Samir **MICHAEL** writer (Israel)  
Meir **OUZIEL** Journalist (Israel)  
Marco **PANNELLA** MEl\*, radical (Italy)  
Joseph **PARITZKY** Member of the Knesset - Shinui (Israel)  
Yasha **REIBMAN** member of the Regional Council of Lombardy (Italy)  
Frédérique **RIES** MEl\*, Group of the European Liberal, Democrat and Reform Party (Belgium)  
Niccolò **RINALDI** Segretario aggiunto del gruppo ELDR al Parlamento Europeo (Italy)  
Giora **ROSEN** Editor/Commentator of the Israeli TV (Israel)  
Eliezer **SANDBERG** Member of the Knesset - Shinui (Israel)  
Luciana **SBARBATI** MFP, Group of the European Liberal, Democrat and Reform Party (Italy)  
Sandrine **SEBBANE** Journaliste, RCU (France)  
Joshua **SOBOL** writer (Israel)  
Gil **TAIEB** vice president adp (France)

1. To support the goal of achieving full Israeli membership European Union.

2. To undertake reasonably, as follows: promote, support and implement concrete steps to further the goal of achieving Israeli European Union membership, each according to his resources and abilities.

3. To undertake to cooperate and communicate with each other irrespective of differing political, social and/or religious beliefs for the purposes of achieving and/or discussing the goal as set out in section 1 of this protocol.

4. To report on their progress, each time, a conference to goal as set out in section 1, should again take place.

5. To congregate in Jerusalem, as to bring to the attention public, the Knesset and to the Israeli government the objective set out in section 1.

**SIGN HERE THE APPEAL**

## *Perception #1: Israeli Membership in the EU*

These views ignore fundamental differences between the Israel's self-definition as a Jewish state and the state of the Jewish People, on the one hand, and the guiding principle of the EU of an open and unified space without sharp distinctions between citizens of Member States.

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. This difference would present great obstacles for Israeli accession to the EU even if Israel were invited to do so. Yet 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.

Recognising that Israel cannot and should not try to become a member of the EU, in distinction from deep and comprehensive cooperation agreements, is a basic starting point for strengthening and developing Israeli-EU relations.

## *Public Opinion*

### *Perception #2: Good Political Relations with the EU are Not Critical for Israel*

In the Dahaf 2004 survey 68 percent of people polled considered relations with the U.S. as more important than relations with the EU.

In our 2007 national survey 69 percent of the respondents said that in thinking about Israeli culture, they think that they have more in common with Americans than with Europeans.

## *Political Elites*

### *Perception #2: Good Political Relations with the EU are Not Critical for Israel*

Many Israeli policy makers share the public's perception that Israel can dismiss the EU mainly because of Israel's special relationship with the U.S.

Former PM Sharon to Israeli ambassadors to EU capitals: You can disregard criticism of European governments since we in Israel "do not owe anyone [i.e. the Europeans] anything. We are obligated only to God!"

## *Perception #2: Good Political Relations with the EU are Not Critical for 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, in security policies, not to mention its desire to be more involved in the Middle East, are likely to remain strong.

The EU must be regarded by Israel as a major global actor bordering on the Middle East which has a potentially constructive role to play in shaping the political-economic-cultural-strategic future of Israel. Europe would certainly like to assume in the international arena.

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.

## *Public Opinion*

### *Perception #3: EU Policies towards Israel are Deeply Rooted and Rigid*

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 antisemitic.

Franco Frattini: “I have to admit that if I look at the past, the EU has on some occasions taken an unbalanced stance toward Israel, even by making an unacceptable confusion between legitimate political criticism of Israel and intolerance against Jewish people that can become anti-Semitism” (2008).



## *Is the EU Doing Enough to Prevent Antisemitism / Islamophobia in Europe?*

	Yes	No	DK
Antisemitism	15%	78%	7%
Islamophobia	17%	64%	19%

(KAS & Pardo 2007)

64 percent of the respondents to the Dahaf 2004 survey agreed with the claim that the EU positions towards Israel are antisemitism thinly disguised as moral principles.

## *Political Elites*

### *Perception #3: EU Policies towards Israel are Deeply Rooted and Rigid*

PM Sharon: "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..." (EUpolitix.com 11/03).

PM Sharon: "the antisemitism virus woke again [in Europe] and is beginning to infect large parts of the continent" (Knesset 2004).

PM Sharon: "we see the spread of the wildest [European] antisemitism in France" (BBC News 2004).

FM Livni: "anti-Semitism is still very much alive [in Europe]. As the home of the Jewish people, this is a fight that should be led by Israel" (2007).



### *Perception #3: EU Policies towards Israel are Deeply Rooted and Rigid*

All Israeli political interviewees to this study identified Europe's Muslims as a main source of the current rise of antisemitism in Europe. For them, in combination with growing Islamic populations in EU Member States and some features of globalisation, the results are radical versions of European antisemitism fused with anti-Zionism, anti-Israelism and anti-Americanism. All interviewees concluded that these culminate in the manifestation of a 'new' European antisemitism superimposed on the traditional core of European antisemitism.

## *A View from Civil Society (I)*

### Three Categories of Israeli Civil Society Organisations

1. Organisations that are not concerned with the EU and for which the Union has no direct relevance;
2. Organisations that know that the EU can assist them but they are not part of the group of organisations that enjoy the Union's financial support; and
3. Organisations that enjoy the Union's financial support.

## *A View from Civil Society (II)*

The third group includes leftist and liberal civil society organisations that see the EU as a potential political and ideological partner.

These organisations perceive the EU as the global defender of human rights and as an independent global power.

Unlike other Israeli sectors, most of the civil society organisations do not perceive the EU as an antisemitic entity, quite the opposite.

Most of the Israeli civil society organisations reported that they 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.

## *Israeli Media Perceptions of the EU (I)*

Press coverage of the EU in Israel's three leading newspapers [Oct 2007-Mar 2008 (Eskenazi, Kantz and Pardo 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	86.83	15.16	34.83	

## *Israeli Media Perceptions of the EU (II)*

Coverage of EU/Europe and EU Member States in Israel's three leading newspapers by theme [Oct 2007-Mar 2008 (Eskenazi, Kantz and Pardo 2008)]

EU/Europe/ Member State	THEME								
	Israel	Jewish Communities, Holocaust, Antisemitism	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 MS	11	21	8	75	4	4	6	25	2
Total	86	107	138	280	25	41	42	54	66

## *Israeli Media Perceptions of the EU (III)*

Number of times the EU/Europe and EU Member States are mentioned in

Israel's three leading newspapers [Oct 2007-Mar 2008 (Eskenazi, Kantz and Pardo 2008)]

EU/Europe/ Member State	POSITION				
	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 MS	7	6	56	91	160
Total	59	29	271	461	

## *Israeli Media Perceptions of the EU (IV)*

This study finds that the majority of the EU media representations in Israel's three leading newspapers framed the EU as 'a powerful political system', sometimes even 'a power of passive aggression', acting internally and externally. But the Union is framed as a marginal economic power with an anti-Jewish character.

While our initial assumption was that the Israeli media would take a neutral to negative approach towards the EU with regard to internal and external affairs, this study reveals that Israel's three leading newspapers took a neutral or positive stance on the Union.

Considering the EU's global economic role and the well developed economic relations between Israel and the EU, we initially assumed that the Israeli media would frame the EU as an economic power. However, media coverage of the EU as an economic actor turned out to be marginal.

## *Israeli Media Perceptions of the EU (V)*

The study finds that representations of the EU as an anti-Jewish and maybe even an antisemitic entity received the third largest share of media attention.

Some of the foreign news editors who were interviewed for this study admitted that the decision to report extensively on antisemitic incidents in Europe and on the Holocaust was “simply because antisemitism and Holocaust sell newspapers in Israel”.



## *Perceptions Play a Critical Role in Euro-Israeli Relations*

If Israel wants to continue developing its relations with the EU, it should do much more of an effort to understand, and in some cases even dispel, its perceptions of the EU.

The same responsibility lies, of course, also on the European side.

“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”.

(François Duchêne 1988)