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THE JEWISH PEOPLE POLICY INSTITUTE

A Relationship Too Deep to Abandon

Essays on Europe, Israel, and the Jewish People



Sharon Pardo

Established by the Jewish Agency for Israel

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Abbreviations

AfD	Alternative for Germany
AI	Artificial Intelligence
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
EC	European Communities
EEAS	European External Action Service
EU	European Union
G20	Group of Twenty
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICC	International Criminal Court
IDF	Israel Defense Forces
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JNS	Jerusalem News Syndicate (formerly Jewish News Syndicate)
JPPI	Jewish People Policy Institute
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PiS	Law and Justice (Poland)
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
PRIMA	Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area
RITA	Report It Always
SAFE	Security Action for Europe
SPD	Social Democratic Party of Germany
SS	Schutzstaffel (Protection Squadron)
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
US	United States
VAC	Vívó és Atlétikai Club (Hungarian Jewish fencing and athletic club)
VERA	Association of University Heads, Israel
WEF	World Economic Forum

Introduction

The Opposite of Indifference

This collection began with a mission.

When I rejoined the Jewish People Policy Institute (JPPI) in October 2025, I undertook what seemed an urgent and increasingly difficult task: helping to strengthen relations among Israel, the Jewish people, and Europe. Short opinion pieces in English offered a way to contribute, however modestly, to this conversation and reach beyond Israeli and Jewish audiences.

That mission reflects JPPI's purpose. The Institute is an independent center of thought and planning devoted to the future of the Jewish people in Israel and the Diaspora. It seeks to strengthen Jewish continuity and prosperity, cultivate a pluralistic Jewish identity, and reinforce cohesion within Israel, among Jewish communities worldwide, and between Israel and the Diaspora. It translates analysis of the challenges facing contemporary Jewry into practical policy, bringing ideas to decision-makers, communal leaders, and the public. These essays contribute to that endeavor, taking ideas beyond the Institute into the public conversation about Jews, Israel, and Europe.

The essays collected here were written over a year and appeared in different publications. They range from European foreign policy, antisemitism, and Jewish life to diplomacy, culture, science, travel, and literature. Some responded to wars and political crises; others began with a book, a journey, a conversation, or an observation.

Together, they make a single argument: Europe, Israel, and the Jewish people are much closer than contemporary political discourse often allows us to recognize.

This does not mean ignoring disagreement. Many essays challenge European governments, institutions, and political movements; others question Israel, its diplomacy, and the policies pursued in its name. I have argued against treating every European attack on Israeli policy as antisemitism, while warning of the growing danger of crossing the boundary between legitimate political opposition and the exclusion of Israelis and Jews. I have challenged Israel's embrace of

parts of Europe's radical far right, as well as European actors who proclaim their commitment to pluralism but make Jewish or Israeli belonging conditional on holding the correct position on Israel.

These arguments emerge from a conviction that disagreement is not the opposite of a relationship. Indifference is.

Israel and Europe can argue precisely because they are deeply entangled. The European Union (EU) is central to Israel's economic, scientific, and academic life. Israeli researchers work with European colleagues. Israeli companies operate in European markets. Israelis travel, study, invest, and increasingly hold citizenship across the continent. Europe remains deeply attractive to Israelis despite their political anger toward it. Jewish communities connect Israel and Europe through families, institutions, religion, memory, and everyday life. Political crises can damage these relationships but cannot erase the worlds built around them.

Historically, too, Europe is embedded in the Israeli story. Zionism was born largely within Europe's intellectual, political, and cultural world. Many institutions, arguments, and traditions that shaped modern Israel emerged from encounters with European political thought and European Jewish experience. European languages, literature, music, law, academia, and political ideas remain visible throughout Israeli society.

The relationship also runs in the other direction. Jewish history is not a footnote to European history. Jews helped make Europe. For centuries, they contributed to its commerce, scholarship, philosophy, science, literature, music, and politics. Europe persecuted and expelled its Jews and ultimately murdered millions, but Jewish life cannot be reduced to European antisemitism or the Holocaust. The Jewish contribution to Europe preceded the catastrophe and survived it. Living Jewish communities are part of European society today.

One question therefore returns throughout these essays: can Europe make room not only for Jewish memory, but for living Jews?

Postwar Europe placed the memory of its murdered Jews near the moral center of the European integration project. That achievement matters enormously. Yet remembering dead Jews is easier than living alongside Jews with political opinions, national attachments, and agency. Living Jews disagree. Some are

Zionists; some are not. Some support Israeli governments; others fiercely oppose them. Israel further complicates the picture as the most visible expression of modern Jewish sovereignty. It exercises power, makes mistakes, and must be open to scrutiny. But responsibility for a government's decisions cannot be transferred to a Jewish student in Berlin, an Israeli academic in Manchester, or a family entering a Jewish center in Budapest.

Israel must learn the corresponding lesson. Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez is not Spain. A hostile statement from the government in London does not define Britain. A disagreement in Brussels does not mean that "Europe hates Israel." Just as Israel rightly insists that Benjamin Netanyahu does not represent every Israeli, it must resist treating European leaders as embodiments of entire societies. Governments change. Geography does not.

This collection resists both the Israeli temptation to give up on Europe and the European temptation to imagine Israel and Jewish political agency removed from Europe's moral and political landscape.

Neither is possible.

These essays owe much to my academic life at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. Teaching and researching European integration, European foreign policy, and Israel-Europe relations keep me moving between theory and reality. Conversations with students, colleagues in Israel and abroad, European diplomats, and EU officials in Brussels and elsewhere have also shaped them. Many arguments began not at a desk but in classrooms, airports, and restaurants, and at conferences across Europe and Israel.

I am deeply grateful to the leadership of the Jewish People Policy Institute for the intellectual space and institutional home to pursue this mission. My thanks go to Prof. Yedidia Stern, Dr. Shuki Friedman, Ms. Ita Alkalay, Ms. Adi Shirazi, Ms. Maya Haser, and all my colleagues at JPPI. The Institute's commitment to the Jewish future and to connecting research with public and policy debate made this project possible. I owe a special debt to the one and only Barry Geltman, who edited most of these pieces and whose judgment, precision, and patience improved them immeasurably, and to Samuel Hyde, JPPI's foreign media spokesperson, who helped them reach audiences beyond Israel.

These essays were written in the difficult period following October 7, 2023, amid war, antisemitism, political polarization, and an alarming deterioration in how Israelis, Europeans, and Jews sometimes speak about one another. That is precisely why I believe the relationship is worth defending.

We do not have the luxury of abandoning one another.

Israel will continue to live on Europe's Mediterranean doorstep. Europe will be essential to Israel's economic, scientific, and cultural future. Jewish communities belong to Europe, not as guests but as participants in its past, present, and future. And the European inheritance will continue to shape Israel and the Jewish people.

The task is to protect, repair, and strengthen a relationship that has existed for centuries – one that political anger can obscure but cannot erase.

Europe runs through Israel, just as the Jewish story runs through Europe.



PART I

Israel and Europe

ESSAY 1

Israelis, Go Visit a European Christmas Market This Year

The Times of Israel, 4/12/2025. https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/why-israelis-should-visit-a-european-christmas-market-this-year/

In recent years, an interesting trend has been taking shape in the world of tourism: many Israelis and Jews are flocking to Christmas markets across Europe. What began as a small stream of winter-flight enthusiasts has evolved into a broader cultural and touristic presence – precisely at a time when relations between Israel and European nations and societies are deeply strained.

Since the October 7 massacre, relations between Israel and large segments of the European public have grown more complicated. Waves of antisemitism, bitter political disputes, and an emotional distancing between peoples who for many years walked a shared path have deepened the sense of estrangement and hostility. Israelis and Jews traveling in Europe feel the charged atmosphere and often conceal their identity; local Jewish communities are contending with violence, a murky surge of antisemitism, and a growing sense of alienation.

Against this backdrop, the visits of Israelis and Jews to Christmas markets across Europe take on a new meaning. Even though these visits are not directly connected to political issues, they open a door to unmediated communications and simple human contact. A brief exchange with a local vendor, a short conversation at one of the stalls, or a small gesture of kindness from locals can break the cycle of hostility, ease suspicion, and remind us that behind the headlines and the constant stream of news, there are human beings.

A starting point for reconciliation and understanding

The Christmas markets themselves are not the main point; it is the human encounters they make possible. They place the Israeli, the Jew, and the European in the same calm, festive space – one where it is easier to look at one another without undue suspicion. The very fact that Israelis and Jews continue to come,

to visit, to stroll around, to ask for recommendations, and to talk with locals sends a message of openness and a desire to maintain ties even when political reality is painful and tumultuous. Sometimes a shared smile or a brief conversation is all it takes to push extremist voices to the margins and restore a bit of what used to bind Israelis and Europeans together, but has been eroded in the past two years amid a protracted war.

In a period when suspicion and hatred have become widespread, the visits of Israelis and Jews to Europe's Christmas markets can serve as an initial point of reconciliation and a measure of mutual understanding. Not formal reconciliation, and not a diplomatic process – but a small human heartbeat that, over time, accumulates. An Israeli family exchanging a few words with a German couple, young Jews who find themselves in an open conversation in Vienna, or even a friendly glance between strangers on a London street – each of these moments gradually creates a new breathing space.

An opportunity for a small step closer

To bridge the hostility, suspicion, and hatred that have built up over the past two years, we must first restore the basic possibility of speaking and meeting. Christmas markets offer precisely that, without grand pretensions: a chance for a small step toward closeness, in a period when a little light and a great deal of hope are needed for the future of relations between Israel and the Jewish communities, on the one hand, and the peoples of Europe, on the other.

ESSAY 2

Broad Consensus, Powerful Global Actor: What Israel, Jews Fail to Understand About the EU

The Jerusalem Post, 8/12/2025. https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-879610

The uproar surrounding the corruption investigation involving Federica Mogherini, the former foreign policy chief of the European Union, has drawn unusual attention in Israel and among some Jewish communities in Europe. Yet the way the news was received is far more important than the event itself.

Mogherini has not been an active political figure for six years, and she left European public life long before the affair erupted. The fact that many in Israel and among Jewish communities in Europe felt the need to "celebrate" her troubles reveals how deeply Israeli and European Jewish leadership struggle to understand the nature of European Union foreign policy.

Mogherini is not the real focal point. She is merely a symbol. She embodied a consistent European line, one that not only continued after her term but intensified in some areas. Her successor, Josep Borrell, was far more sharply critical of Israel. He advanced a clear agenda on human rights and international law and used much harsher language on almost every issue relating to Israel.

Even so, Borrell's stance did not stem solely from his personal opinion. He expressed a policy shaped over many years and rooted in deep guiding principles within the institutions of the European Union.

Borrell's successor, Kaja Kallas, entered the role with a completely different set of priorities. She is focused on the war in Ukraine and on leading a firm line against Russia. Yet even during the single year she has held the position, it has become clear that she has adopted a more critical stance toward Israel than the one she brought to her term.

This development is entirely predictable. It is the result of the European Union's structure, not of Kallas's personality. Anyone who holds that office is required to represent a broad political framework of all EU member states. This framework defines the boundaries of policy rather than the individuals themselves.

Nevertheless, in Israel and in parts of the European Jewish communities, many continue to view European foreign policy as a field driven by the personal inclinations of individual politicians. The understanding that this is a stable institutional system fails to take root.

How the European Union's foreign policy is shaped

The Union's foreign policy is shaped through broad agreement among its 27 member states. It is based on international law, human rights, and democracy, and on an approach that requires territorial compromise in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It does not truly shift with the rotation of office holders. It is only minimally influenced by the personal preferences of European Union leaders. It is a long-term system representing the collective will of all member states of the Union.

Jewish communities in Europe sometimes assign too much weight to personal relationships with political figures. There, too, exists an expectation that the replacement of a public official will lead to a change in European attitudes toward Jews or toward Israel.

In practice, the picture is far more complex. The European struggle against antisemitism continues along a consistent trajectory, almost regardless of who leads the European institutions. The same is true of Israel. European criticism is not the product of any single person but of a broad political framework that seeks to outline a unified vision of the international order.

Within this reality, Mogherini's fall from grace is "celebrated" in Jerusalem. Yet zooming out reveals that anyone who is moved by the downfall of a figure who left European politics years ago shows a fundamental misunderstanding of how Israel's foreign relations with Europe actually work. Instead of viewing Europe as an entity defined by values, principles, and structured processes, Jerusalem tends to see Brussels as a battleground of winners and losers. Such an approach prevents the creation of a coherent Israeli grand strategy toward the European Union and ultimately weakens both sides.

Here lies the true challenge for Israel and for European Jewry. The continent is under significant strain. Antisemitism is rising. European society is deeply divided in its attitudes toward Israel. The war in Ukraine and the wars in the Middle East all generate fear and instability within Europe. In such a climate, there is no real value in an imagined victory over a former politician who no longer influences events. The only meaningful step is to understand Europe as it truly is: a multilayered system that does not respond to small pressures but acts from a political worldview that transcends generations and party lines.

Only if Jerusalem and the European Jewish communities internalize that they must engage in genuine, substantive dialogue with the European Union system itself, rather than with whichever politician happens to hold office at a given moment, will a more stable and thoughtful diplomatic future be possible.

Mogherini was not the problem, nor was Borrell, nor is Kallas. The problem is the refusal to recognize that the European Union is a powerful global actor with a coherent and long-term worldview, not a collection of interchangeable politicians. Israel and the Jews can gain a great deal from their relationship with the European Union, but only if they stop chasing symbols and begin seriously understanding the broad, potent, and complex political entity with which they must contend.

ESSAY 3

The Perils of Israel's Courtship of Europe's Far Right

The Jerusalem Post, 26/1/2026. https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-884576

This week, Jerusalem hosts the second "International Conference on Combating Antisemitism, Generation of Truth." The program bills the conference as a serious reflection on the sources of contemporary antisemitism and the responsibilities of democratic states. This makes one issue impossible to ignore: Israel's long-standing courtship of Europe's radical right under Benjamin Netanyahu.

For more than a decade, Netanyahu has treated alliances with European far-right populist and radical Eurosceptic actors as strategic assets. The logic is transactional. These parties defend Israel in European institutions, mute criticism of Israeli policy, and sometimes even break with official European positions on Jerusalem or the settlements. In return, Israel grants them political legitimacy and treats their professions of friendship as proof of moral rehabilitation.

After October 7, 2023, this approach is not merely controversial. It is actively dangerous. Europe is experiencing a sustained rise in antisemitism. Jewish communities across the continent report growing fear, harassment, and violence, alongside the normalization of conspiratorial and exclusionary political language. In this climate, strengthening illiberal political forces does not protect Jews. On the contrary, it reinforces political styles that thrive on identifying enemies within and that have historically turned against minorities once circumstances shift. Even when today's far-right claims to stand with Israel, the political ecosystems it nurtures remain deeply corrosive for Jewish life in Europe.

At the same time, Israel is paying a strategic price that goes far beyond the symbolic. Europe is Israel's largest trade partner, accounting for the lion's share of Israeli exports, imports, investment flows, and technological cooperation. More importantly, Europe is central to Israel's scientific and innovation architecture.

Israeli universities, startups, and research institutes are deeply embedded in European networks of funding, peer review, and collaboration.

How Israel-Europe ties are strained by Netanyahu's embracing of the far right

These networks are already under strain. The scientific and academic boycott of Israel is no longer a theoretical threat. To varying degrees, it already exists. European universities and research bodies have delayed, limited, or quietly withdrawn from cooperation with Israeli partners. Individual researchers face tacit exclusion from consortia, conferences, and joint projects. These decisions often occur below the governmental level, making them harder to contest and easier to normalize.

The debate around "Horizon Europe" – the European Union's key funding program for research and innovation – brings this danger into sharp relief. In mid-2025, the European Commission proposed a partial suspension of Israel's participation in certain parts of the program, particularly those related to the European Innovation Council Accelerator. Even when such measures are narrowed or stalled, the signal is unmistakable. Israel's position inside Europe's flagship research framework can no longer be taken for granted.

This is where Netanyahu's embrace of Europe's radical right becomes strategically self-defeating. While it may generate tactical support from a handful of governments, it accelerates Israel's alienation from the European mainstream that actually shapes research cooperation: universities, funding agencies, professional associations, and civil society. These actors are far less impressed by symbolic alliances with illiberal leaders and far more sensitive to questions of democratic norms, academic freedom, and international legitimacy.

A conference in Jerusalem dedicated to combating antisemitism should confront this contradiction honestly. If Israel seeks genuine solidarity with European Jews and wants to preserve its place at the heart of Europe's economic and scientific future, it must rethink alliances that trade short-term political cover for long-term isolation. In the post-October 7 world, this is not only a moral reckoning. It is a question of Israel's national interest, and the cost of getting it wrong is already being paid.

ESSAY 4

Europe Struggles to Matter in a Chaotic Middle East Today

The Jerusalem Post, 22/2/2026. https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-887483

For decades, Europe cultivated the belief that the Middle East was not merely a distant arena of instability, but a defining stage upon which the European integration project could demonstrate global relevance. From the aftermath of the Six-Day War in 1967 onward, the conflict became a recurring fixture on the European foreign policy agenda.

It was never simply about diplomacy.

It was about identity.

Europe was emerging from its own violent 20th century, and sought to present itself as a normative power capable of shaping peace beyond its borders.

That aspiration has always contained an element of tension. Europe wanted to matter. But it rarely possessed the instruments of hard power necessary to impose outcomes. The result was a paradox that critics captured succinctly: Europe was often a player, but primarily a payer.

This pattern became particularly visible after the Oslo Accords in 1993, when the European Union (EU) positioned itself as a central financial pillar of the peace process. European funds sustained Palestinian institutions, supported civil society initiatives, and underwrote much of the infrastructure associated with nation-building. Europe's economic weight translated into an undeniable presence, even if political influence remained uneven.

Today, however, that long-standing equation appears increasingly fragile.

The past two and a half years have reshaped the regional landscape in ways that have exposed the limits of European engagement. The October 7 massacre

and the ensuing Israel-Hamas war generated seismic political and humanitarian consequences.

The subsequent 12-day war between Israel and Iran in 2025 further underscored the volatility of a region already stretched by overlapping crises. Against this backdrop, the EU has struggled to articulate a coherent strategic posture. Statements have been plentiful. Influence has been scarce.

Europe risks being perceived as a marginal actor

The uncomfortable truth is that Europe now risks being perceived not as an underpowered actor, but as a marginal one.

This evolving reality is reflected in Europe's reaction to what Trump has branded the "Board of Peace." This initiative, controversial and loosely defined, carries the unmistakable imprint of American political theater. (It also comes with a $1 b. membership fee.) Europe's response has been revealing.

The EU has made it clear that it wishes to remain in the room. Participation signals continued interest. Absence would signal irrelevance. At the same time, Brussels has been careful to avoid any suggestion that it seeks to displace or undermine the United Nations' longstanding role in the Middle East peace process.

This duality captures Europe's dilemma. It wants visibility without confrontation, presence without ownership. The EU's instinct is to observe, engage, and influence indirectly, while preserving the legitimacy of multilateral frameworks. In principle, this is defensible.

The UN remains the internationally recognized forum for conflict resolution. In practice, however, such restraint risks reinforcing the impression that Europe is content with symbolic involvement rather than substantive leadership.

Perception, in diplomacy, is rarely a secondary matter. The launch of the 2025 EU "Pact for the Mediterranean" was precisely intended to counter this sense of drift. The initiative promised renewed economic cooperation, investment, and regional partnership.

It sought to reposition Europe as a long-term stakeholder in its southern neighborhood. Yet, the timing has complicated its reception. In a period defined by wars, security threats, and geopolitical realignments, development-oriented frameworks struggle to command attention. Grand strategies cannot easily compete with immediate crises.

More troubling is the growing suspicion that Europe's diminished role is not solely a matter of capability, but also of priority.

Europe today faces an existential security challenge much closer to home. The Russian war of aggression in Ukraine has reoriented political energies, financial resources, and strategic thinking.

European governments are consumed by questions of deterrence, defense spending, and preparedness for the possibility of broader confrontation. In such an environment, the Middle East slides down the hierarchy of urgency.

This is not indifference. It is triage.

Still, for regional actors, the distinction may be academic.

Europe's limited profile at the inauguration ceremony of Trump's Board of Peace only amplified this perception.

Representation matters in international politics. Sending a low-key EU commissioner conveyed a message, intentional or not, about Europe's relative investment in the initiative. For regional observers, symbolism accumulates. The narrative that emerges is one of cautious engagement bordering on disengagement.

Europe, as ever, appears primarily preoccupied with itself.

What does this diminished posture mean for Israel?

First, it demands realism.

The EU is unlikely to function as a decisive political broker in the current Middle Eastern landscape. Divergent member-state positions, institutional constraints,

and competing priorities limit the Union's capacity for unified strategic action. Israel cannot tie its security calculus to European diplomatic intervention.

Yet, dismissing Europe outright would be a strategic miscalculation.

The EU remains Israel's largest trading partner, a relationship that anchors deep economic interdependence.

European markets, investment flows, and regulatory frameworks shape significant sectors of the Israeli economy.

Even more consequential is Europe's role in supporting Israeli science and technology. Through research and innovation programs, European funding has contributed substantially to Israel's academic and technological prowess. This cooperation reflects a longstanding European admiration for Israeli innovation, even amid persistent political tensions.

That contradiction is unlikely to disappear.

Europe will almost certainly emerge as one of the largest contributors to the reconstruction of Gaza once conditions permit large-scale rebuilding. Financial involvement has long been Europe's preferred instrument of regional engagement.

However, economic participation does not necessarily translate into political alignment. European criticism of Israeli policies has become an unconcealed feature of the relationship, rooted in legal, humanitarian, and normative frameworks that Brussels considers central to its identity.

For Israel, therefore, the EU represents neither a reliable political ally nor an irrelevant actor. It is an indispensable economic partner coupled with a frequently adversarial diplomatic voice.

Navigating this complexity requires abandoning binary expectations.

Europe's waning influence in the Middle East does not signal the end of its regional presence, but it does mark a transformation. The EU is recalibrating its external ambitions under the pressure of internal vulnerabilities and immediate security threats. Whether this recalibration proves temporary or structural remains an open question.

What is clear is that Europe's long-cherished aspiration to act as a global player in the Middle East now faces its most severe test.

History shows that geopolitical vacuums rarely remain unfilled. If Europe retreats, others will step forward. The consequences of that shift will not be confined to the region. They will reverberate back toward a continent that once believed its future relevance depended on shaping distant peace.

Brussels may still wish to remain in the room. The question is whether it will matter.

ESSAY 5

When Iran Tensions Trigger Europe's Israel Reflex

Ynet Global, 26/2/2026. https://www.ynetnews.com/opinions-analysis/article/s1drszcdbe

Across European capitals, a familiar mood is returning: anxiety without clarity. Governments brace for consequences that have not yet materialized but already feel real.

The latest tremor comes from Washington, where US President Donald Trump is weighing the possibility of striking Iran. European officials, diplomats and security analysts openly discuss retaliation scenarios, regional escalation and the risk of a widening conflict whose repercussions could extend far beyond the Middle East.

Fear, in international politics, rarely travels alone. It summons memory, identity and reflex.

Psychologists have long studied how associations shape perception. Consider the Mariko Aoki phenomenon, the curious tendency some people report of feeling the urgent need for a bathroom upon entering a bookstore. Researchers suspect conditioning. Environmental cues quietly provoke reactions that feel sudden and involuntary.

Another example is the 11:11 clock phenomenon. People repeatedly notice the same symmetrical numbers. The coincidence appears meaningful, though psychology attributes it to pattern recognition rather than any hidden design.

Both quirks illuminate something fundamental about cognition. Human beings are creatures of association. Stimuli trigger responses that often bypass deliberate reasoning.

This perspective helps explain the uneasy dynamic between Israel and the European Union (EU). In Israeli public discourse, references to Europe frequently provoke immediate emotional reactions. Skepticism. Irritation. Defensiveness. The consistency is Pavlovian – a stimulus appears, and a conditioned response follows.

For years, observers primarily attributed this sensitivity to history. Europe occupies a singular place in the Jewish and Israeli consciousness. The Holocaust is not merely remembered. It is woven into collective identity.

Sadly, antisemitism in Europe is no longer confined to history books. Since the October 7 Hamas onslaught and the war that followed, Jewish communities across the continent have reported rising hostility and renewed insecurity. Synagogues require heavier protection. Jewish students describe harassment. Incidents once assumed to belong to a darker era have reemerged in contemporary public life.

This shift reshapes perception. When European leaders sharply criticize Israeli military operations in Gaza, many Israelis do not hear their statements in isolation. They encounter them alongside reports of attacks on Jewish institutions, antisemitic rhetoric at demonstrations and a broader atmosphere of unease. The psychological effect is cumulative. Pre-existing sensitivities are exacerbated by present-day experience.

At the same time, Europe's posture toward Israel has grown more politically charged. The Gaza war is deeply embedded in domestic debates across EU member states. Electoral pressures, coalition politics, street protests and media narratives shape governmental responses. European foreign policy increasingly reflects domestic politics.

Complicating matters further is the EU's self-conception as a "Normative Power." Unlike traditional geopolitical actors' emphasis on military strength (hard power),

the EU defines much of its global role through values, legal frameworks and moral language (soft power). Human rights. International law. Humanitarian principles. These are not merely instruments of policy; they are foundational components of European identity.

From the European perspective, most criticism of Israel stems from this normative commitment. The suffering and displacement of Palestinian civilians demand a response composed in the language of Europe's political vocabulary. Silence seems like moral abdication.

For many Israelis, European admonitions carry a uniquely charged resonance. Israelis look at Europe and see not only the Holocaust but centuries of colonial expansion, imperial violence and exploitation. They also see a continent in the midst of grappling with resurgent antisemitism. In that context, a question surfaces with emotional force. Who is Europe to lecture Israel on morality and the use of force?

Across Europe, a parallel psychological mechanism is at work. European societies interpret Israeli actions through the prism of their own historical reckoning. Europe's colonial past remains a source of enduring guilt. Images of overwhelming military power exercised over a largely stateless population evoke uncomfortable parallels.

For some Europeans, Israel is a mirror reflecting elements of Europe's own troubled past. Occupation. Power asymmetry. Civilians suffering. The response is often cloaked with moral urgency, sometimes moral absolutism.

The prospect of confrontation with Iran intensifies these dynamics. Israeli security anxieties are inseparable from Tehran's rhetoric, regional proxy conflicts and nuclear ambitions. These are not abstract strategic puzzles in Israel. They are perceived as existential threats. Under such conditions, Israeli society is primed for heightened vigilance. External pressure feels less like principled disagreement and more like disregard for vulnerability.

European governments, meanwhile, navigate domestic landscapes where public opinion on Gaza exerts growing political influence. Leaders respond to voters, activists and coalition partners. Criticism of Israel becomes not only an ethical positioning but a political necessity.

Both sides act rationally within their own frameworks. Yet the interaction of these frameworks produces persistent friction. This is the reflex problem.

Conditioned reactions are rooted in real experiences. Israeli sensitivities arise from history and present insecurity. European responses arise from normative commitments and historical introspection. But when reflex dominates, nuance collapses.

If Israelis interpret most European criticism as latent hostility, meaningful debate becomes nearly impossible. If Europeans interpret Israeli defensiveness as moral blindness, empathy evaporates. Breaking this cycle requires uncommon self-awareness.

For Europe, credibility as a normative actor depends on confronting antisemitism with unflinching clarity. Jewish insecurity erodes moral authority. Values lose persuasive force when they appear unevenly defended.

For Israel, diplomatic resilience may benefit from distinguishing between criticism rooted in prejudice and criticism rooted in genuinely held normative frameworks. Not every rebuke is animus, even in a climate where animus undeniably exists.

Most importantly, both societies must recognize the psychological dimension shaping their interaction. Europe is not merely a political entity in Israeli and Jewish consciousness. It is a symbol fraught with memory and suspicion. Israel is not merely a foreign state in European politics. It is a symbolic arena for debates about power, morality and history.

Symbols trigger emotion. Emotion shapes reflex. Reflex shapes policy. Unlike harmless perceptual quirks, political reflexes carry consequences. They narrow the space for dialogue precisely when dialogue becomes most necessary, especially at moments of mounting uncertainty, when fear once again sets the tone across continents.

ESSAY 6

Europe Stands Behind Israel

The Jerusalem Post Printed Edition, 3/3/2026, page 10.

Roaring Lion: From Berlin to London, Europe Stands by Israel in War with Iran – Opinion – The Jerusalem Post, 3/3/2026. https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-888481

Europe's voice is often sharp when it comes to Israel's policies in the Palestinian arena. European leaders criticize settlement expansion, question Israel's peace diplomacy, and warn against steps that might foreclose a two-state solution. This criticism is real. And it is sometimes public and pointed. But it coexists with another reality that is just as enduring – and far more consequential. When Israel's very survival is at stake, Europe stands with it.

The latest statements from Berlin, London, Paris, Tirana, and The Hague, in response to the war with Iran, make this plain. The tone varies; the emphasis differs. Yet, beneath the diplomatic phrasing lies a consistent commitment to Israel's security.

Consider German Chancellor Friedrich Merz. His message following the joint action against Iran was plain: Germany remains committed to the security of Israel. He coupled that commitment with support for the Iranian people and condemnation of Tehran's suppression. This dual framing is not new. It reflects a long-standing doctrine that Israel's security is a matter of German responsibility. Berlin may argue with Jerusalem about peace-process tactics, but it does not equivocate when Israel faces an existential threat.

The same pattern holds in London. Prime Minister Keir Starmer made clear that the Iranian regime must never acquire nuclear weapons. He stressed that British forces were not participating in strikes inside Iran, but confirmed that British aircraft were in the skies as part of coordinated regional defense operations.

That detail matters. It signals that when missiles fly toward Israel and its partners, Britain acts to intercept and defend. Criticism of Israeli policy in Gaza and Ramallah does not translate into indifference when Tel Aviv and Beersheba are under fire.

Paris struck a more generic tone, yet the substance was unmistakable. President Emmanuel Macron warned of the grave consequences of escalation and called for urgent diplomacy. At the same time, he stated that France stands ready to deploy necessary resources to protect its closest partners if requested.

Europe's support for Israel regarding the conflict with Iran

France has been among the most vocal European critics of Israeli settlement policy. Still, when the issue shifts from borders and negotiations to nuclear proliferation and ballistic missiles aimed at Israel, the calculus changes. The French position aligns with the core European assessment that a nuclear-armed Iran would threaten not only Israel, but the international order itself.

Perhaps most striking was the clarity from Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama. The leader of a Muslim-majority country, Rama called for formally designating the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps a terrorist organization, and declared firm support for efforts to prevent Tehran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

Albania's stance reflects direct experience with Iranian cyber aggression and a broader moral alignment with Israel's right to defend itself. His statement underscores a wider European truth: Support for Israel's survival is not confined to one religious or cultural bloc: It is anchored in a shared understanding of security and law.

Even the more cautious response from the Netherlands fits the pattern. The new Dutch prime minister, Rob Jetten, urged restraint and de-escalation. But the accompanying foreign ministry statement catalogued deep concerns about the Iranian regime's repression, nuclear program, and destabilizing role. Calling for diplomacy does not negate recognition of the threat. It reflects a European instinct to contain escalation while acknowledging that Iran's actions are a central driver of instability.

To understand why this matters, one must look beyond the present crisis. Europe's record during earlier wars tells a consistent story.

In 1967, as Israel faced mobilization by neighboring Arab states, European governments were divided over tactics and rhetoric, but none aligned themselves

with calls for Israel's destruction. After the war, Europe became a key arena for diplomatic efforts that preserved Israel's legitimacy in international forums.

In 1973, during the Yom Kippur War, some European states were cautious in the face of the Arab oil embargo. But even then, the essential commitment to Israel's existence held. No major European power endorsed the eliminationist goals voiced by some of Israel's adversaries.

During the First Gulf War (1990-91), following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, European states joined the coalition that enforced international law and ultimately reduced the missile threat that had reached Israeli cities. European air forces and militaries participated in operations designed to uphold regional stability and prevent the normalization of aggression as a tool of statecraft.

The same logic was visible during the 12-Day War between Iran and Israel in June 2025. While European leaders urged restraint and renewed negotiations over Tehran's nuclear program, European air forces and defense systems contributed to broader regional efforts to shield Israeli airspace from incoming threats. That assistance was not always front-page news. It was, however, a concrete expression of solidarity when Israel's civilian population was in danger.

I believe that Europe's growing distance from Middle Eastern battlefields certainly reflects a decline in its strategic weight. Its influence today is not what it once was, especially when compared with Washington, Beijing, or rising regional powers.

Europe is often reactive rather than decisive. Yet, even from this critical vantage point, relevance cannot be judged only by who fires the first shot or commands the largest military footprint. It must also be measured by who is prepared to stand unequivocally for Israel's survival when that survival is at risk. On that defining question, Europe still carries real weight.

On that score, Europe has been consistent. It has supported diplomatic frameworks, including negotiations over Iran's nuclear activities, because it seeks to prevent war. It has criticized Israeli policies that it believes complicate a two-state solution, because it views such an outcome as the best path to long-term stability. But when confronted with actors that deny Israel's right to exist or pursue capabilities that could make such a denial catastrophic, Europe closes ranks.

This duality can be uncomfortable. Israeli leaders sometimes bristle at European lectures; European officials sometimes express frustration at Israeli politics. Yet, beneath the surface disagreements lie a shared strategic baseline. Europe does not see Israel as a temporary project or a bargaining chip. Europe sees Israel as the sovereign state it is, whose destruction would be a moral and geopolitical failure of the highest order.

That is why statements from Berlin, London, Paris, Tirana, and The Hague converge on one essential point: Iran must not be allowed to threaten Israel with nuclear weapons. Attacks on Israel and on regional partners must stop. Diplomacy is preferable, but deterrence is indispensable.

Europe may no longer dominate Middle Eastern geopolitics, and its leverage is often limited. But when the question shifts from policy disputes to survival, the pattern across decades rings clear.

Europe argues with Israel. Europe pressures Israel. Europe occasionally disappoints Israel. Yet, when missiles fly and existential threats loom, Europe is there.

ESSAY 7

The War that Moved Europe's Future Closer to Jerusalem

The Jerusalem Post Printed Edition, 10/3/2026.
The Jerusalem Post, 22/3/2026. https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-889233

Europe has long imagined itself as a global strategic power with the agency to shape its own destiny. Yet the geopolitical landscape of recent years has revealed a far more uncomfortable reality.

Whether Europeans like it or not, the European Union's (EU) economic stability is increasingly determined by forces outside its borders.

In the east, the war in Ukraine has bound Europe's energy and security outlook to Russia. To the south, a widening conflict between Israel and Iran is beginning to tie the Union's economic future to decisions made in Jerusalem.

This shift is structural rather than ideological. A war involving Iran immediately reverberates through global energy markets. Iran sits near one of the most critical maritime passages for global oil trade. Even the possibility of disruption sends markets into turbulence.

Europe is particularly vulnerable to these shocks. After cutting its reliance on Russian pipeline gas following the invasion of Ukraine, the continent replaced much of that supply with more expensive liquefied natural gas and imports from distant suppliers.

As a result, Europe is now deeply exposed to the volatility of global energy markets.

If the conflict between Israel and Iran continues or intensifies, energy prices will almost certainly rise further.

Shipping costs increase, traders price in geopolitical risk, and supply becomes more uncertain. The economic consequences quickly reach Europe.

Higher energy prices fuel inflation, weaken industrial competitiveness, and slow economic growth. Households face rising energy bills, and European industries struggle with higher production costs.

Even a modest disruption can have outsized economic effects in such an environment.

This is why the war's duration matters so much for Europe. A short conflict might allow markets to stabilize.

A prolonged campaign against Iran would have the opposite effect. Continued instability in energy markets could weigh on Europe's economy for years and undermine confidence in the euro.

Migration pressures ahead

But energy is only one dimension of the challenge. Fresh waves of migration may become an equally significant consequence. Iran is a country of more than 90 million people whose economy has already been under heavy strain for years.

Inflation, sanctions, and political unrest have eroded living standards across the country. A prolonged war would deepen that pressure dramatically.

If the conflict disrupts infrastructure or creates widespread insecurity, large numbers of people would likely flee the country. The experience of earlier conflicts across the Middle East demonstrates how quickly such movements can grow.

Geography places Europe directly along the likely route. Any large-scale migration from Iran would most likely move west through Turkey and toward the southeast borders of the EU.

European governments are well aware of this possibility.

Countries along the migration corridor are already watching the situation closely. For states such as Hungary, which lies on a key land route into the Union, the prospect of another migration wave represents a serious political and security concern.

A prolonged conflict in Iran could therefore generate pressure not only on the EU's economy but also on its internal cohesion. Migration crises have repeatedly exposed divisions within the Union.

Another sudden influx of refugees could revive those tensions.

Energy shocks and migration pressures together create a powerful geopolitical reality. Both depend heavily on how the conflict between Israel and Iran unfolds.

This leads to an uncomfortable conclusion. Europe's economic outlook may increasingly depend on strategic decisions made in Jerusalem. Israel's leadership will determine whether the war remains limited or develops into a longer confrontation.

Those decisions will naturally be driven by Israel's security priorities. And their consequences will extend far beyond the Middle East.

The irony is striking. For years European leaders have spoken about strategic autonomy and the EU's capacity to shape its own future. The current geopolitical environment reveals an opposite trend.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine forced Europe to reorganize its entire energy system and exposed deep vulnerabilities in its economic model. Now, a second external dependency is emerging.

If the war with Iran becomes prolonged, Europe's future will increasingly be shaped not by decisions taken in Brussels but by those taken in Jerusalem.

Europe now stands between two geopolitical fault lines. In the east, the war in Ukraine ties the continent's security environment to Russia. In the south, the confrontation between Israel and Iran threatens to bind Europe's economic stability to Israel's military strategy.

This is the strategic reality that Europe must confront.

Like it or not, the EU's future is being shaped less in Brussels and increasingly in Moscow and Jerusalem. Decisions far from the halls of the European institutions now carry profound consequences for Europe's economy, security, and political stability.

As the war with Iran unfolds, choices made in Jerusalem may influence energy prices, migration pressure, and financial stability across the continent.

The uncomfortable reality is that the Union's prosperity and cohesion are becoming ever more dependent on conflicts and calculations beyond Europe's borders.

ESSAY 8

Spain's Israel Gamble Will Cost Both Nations

Jewish News Syndicate (JNS), 16/2/2026. https://www.jns.org/spains-israel-gamble-will-cost-both-nations/

Philadelphia Jewish Exponent, 25/3/2026. https://www.jewishexponent.com/opinion-spains-israel-gamble-will-cost-both-nations/

Washington Jewish Week, 25/3/2026. https://www.washingtonjewishweek.com/opinion-spains-israel-gamble-will-cost-both-nations/

Baltimore Jewish Times, 26/3/2026. https://www.jewishtimes.com/opinion-spains-israel-gamble-will-cost-both-nations/

Spain just took its most serious diplomatic step yet in its dispute with Israel: It permanently withdrew its ambassador from Tel Aviv, leaving the embassy under a chargé d'affaires and signaling that the rupture is no longer temporary but structural.

That decision is more than a diplomatic gesture. It marks a turning point in relations between the two countries, as well as sets the stage for a deeper political and cultural divide.

The widening diplomatic distance between Spain and Israel is more than a routine disagreement between governments. It is a strategic and cultural rupture with consequences that may stretch far beyond the current political moment. What is unfolding risks damaging bilateral relations, weakening Israeli ties with the European Union, and eroding a historical connection between Spain and the Jewish world.

The only clear beneficiary may be Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, whose political survival appears to depend partly on adopting a confrontational stance toward Israel and the United States.

Spain is not a marginal player in the European Union. It is one of the bloc's largest member states and a key NATO ally whose voice carries weight in Brussels and across the Mediterranean region.

For Israel, relations with Spain have been integral to a broader strategy of maintaining strong ties with principal European democracies. When a country of Spain's size and influence downgrades its relationship with Israel, the damage reverberates through the entire Israeli relationship with Europe.

The rift did not appear overnight. It reflects a combination of ideological politics, domestic pressures and geopolitical positioning.

Sánchez leads a fragile coalition that depends on far-left parties and regional nationalist movements, many of which hold strongly critical views of Israel. In a polarized environment, adopting a hard line toward Israel helps him consolidate his political base. Foreign policy becomes an instrument of domestic survival rather than a strategic calculation.

Madrid has also sought to position itself as a moral voice in European diplomacy, a champion of international law and humanitarian concerns in the Middle East. Spain sees itself as a bridge between Europe, North Africa and the Arab world, and a forceful stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict reinforces that self-image. A third factor is the broader shift in European public opinion following the Gaza war. Governments across the continent are navigating between security concerns, public pressure and humanitarian arguments. Spain has chosen to go further than most EU member states in criticizing Israel.

The consequences of this approach are serious. Spain has become an important destination for Israeli tourism, investment and business cooperation. Thousands of Israeli entrepreneurs and technology companies have established connections there over the past decade, reinforced by growing people-to-people ties. Israeli tourists visit Spanish cities in large numbers each year, and cultural exchanges have expanded steadily.

Since the Hamas-led terrorist attacks in southern Israel on October 7, 2023, a notable Israeli community has taken root in Spain – some drawn by professional opportunity, and others seeking respite during a prolonged period of war and insecurity. This movement of people has created deeper social bonds between the two nations. And so, the diplomatic downgrade sends a troubling signal to all of these communities and networks.

But the damage is not just economic or political. It is historical and cultural. The story of the Jewish people in the Iberian Peninsula is one of the deepest and most complex chapters in European history.

For centuries, Jewish communities flourished in Sepharad. Jewish scholars, philosophers, poets and merchants helped shape Spanish civilization during the medieval period. Even after the expulsion of 1492, the memory of Sephardic Spain continued to shape Jewish identity across the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Judaism has always been part of the Spanish story, just as Spain has always been part of Jewish memory.

In recent years, Spain took a remarkable step to reconnect with that legacy. Its 2015 law offering citizenship to descendants of Jews expelled during the Spanish Inquisition was widely celebrated as a gesture of historical reconciliation. Tens of thousands of Jews and Israelis – many from families with Sephardic and Mizrachi roots who had preserved the memory of Sepharad across generations – relished the opportunity to apply for Spanish citizenship. The policy created a bridge between the two countries, and gave many Jews and Israelis a renewed connection to Spanish heritage through language, culture and belonging.

The current diplomatic rupture carries symbolic weight that goes far beyond politics. For Israel, losing the partnership of a major EU member state complicates its position within European institutions. Spain plays an influential role in shaping Euro-Mediterranean policy, and its positions carry weight in Brussels on matters ranging from trade agreements to diplomatic initiatives in the Middle East. If Spain leads a more critical European approach toward Israel, the ripples could reach the broader EU-Israel relationship.

Yet the costs for Spain itself shouldn't be underestimated. Years of patient work rebuilding ties with Jewish communities around the world, through the citizenship law, cultural programs, museums and educational initiatives, risk being undermined by a prolonged political clash with Israel. It creates the damaging perception that Spain is distancing itself from the very community with which it sought reconciliation a decade ago.

The current course is a losing proposition for nearly everyone involved. Israeli diplomacy suffers as an important European partner grows more distant. Ill-considered Spanish diplomacy risks weakening ties with a proven democratic

ally; coupled with this, economic, technological and human connections are on the line. A relationship rooted in centuries of shared memory must not become entangled in short-term political calculations.

Spain and Israel have far more to gain from cooperation than from confrontation. Their shared history, economies and cultural ties provide a strong foundation for partnership. Allowing that foundation to erode would be a mistake not only for diplomacy but for the deeper story that links the Iberian Peninsula and the Jewish people across time.

If this rupture continues, it will be remembered as a moment when political expediency overshadowed history, and when a relationship spanning centuries was sacrificed for short-term advantage.

ESSAY 9

What Europe Planted, Israel Cultivates in Wartime

The Times of Israel, 3/5/2026. https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/what-europe-planted-israel-cultivates-in-wartime/

The Middle East is enduring another fragile pause. The ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah holds uneasily. The understanding with Iran remains precarious. The war in Gaza continues to define daily life in stark and immediate ways. In this suspended moment of instability, a small, quietly remarkable book has now appeared in Hebrew. *Jardins en temps de guerre* (*Gardens in Wartime*), by the Bosnian writer Teodor Cerić, was born in a similarly unsettled time. Unfortunately, an English translation has not yet been published.

In the spring of 1992, Cerić, then a young student, was forced to flee Sarajevo as war engulfed the city. What followed was not a conventional story of exile but a restless journey across Europe. For seven years, he moved through cities, towns, and rural landscapes with no fixed destination. Along the way, he found gardens. Some were grand and historic, such as the Tuileries in Paris or the landscape park

at Painshill outside London. Others were marginal and improvised, shaped by solitary figures at the edges of society.

Derek Jarman's 1990 film *The Garden* marked a turning point for Cerić, allowing him to see these spaces not as aesthetic luxuries but as responses to catastrophe. When the world trembles with death, he suggests, the only meaningful act may be to turn any fragment of land into a place that invites life.

The Europe Cerić traverses is more than a backdrop. It is a cultural terrain where gardens reflect centuries of artistic ambition and philosophical inquiry. From French geometry to English pastoral design, they express a recurring effort to impose order on a fractured world. Cerić reads them against this tradition and arrives at a different conclusion: refuge.

Each garden becomes a place where the pressure of history softens, and catastrophe recedes into echo. His writing, which fuses diary, essay, and nature writing into a single sustained voice, becomes a shelter in its own right, mirroring the spaces it describes.

That this deeply European work now appears in Hebrew carries significance beyond the pleasures of literature. The gardens Cerić encounters belong to a continent inseparable from Jewish history. Europe is not incidental to that story. It is one of its central arenas. Jewish communities lived and created across this landscape for centuries, from Paris to Vienna, from Amsterdam to Sarajevo itself. These places also became sites of expulsion, persecution, and destruction. To read Cerić in Hebrew is to encounter Europe as a shared and fractured inheritance.

The relationship between Jewish life and Europe has long been unsettled. Europe offered intellectual belonging while repeatedly denying security. Zionism emerged in part from this contradiction, shaped by European ideas and by the recognition that Europe could not sustain Jewish existence. Those who came to build Israel carried Europe with them, not only in language and thought but also in memory.

Among the images they carried was the garden: cultivated, ordered, and fragile. Yet the soil into which they planted that image was not empty. The Shamouti groves around Jaffa, tended by Arab families across the nineteenth century and shipped from its port to Liverpool and Trieste long before the First *Aliyah*; the

olive terraces of the central highlands, worked since the Iron Age; the biarah and the bustan, Andalusian and Persian forms that had reached Palestine through centuries of Mediterranean and Ottoman exchange – these were the ground onto which the European imagination was grafted. The orchards of the early settlements were acts of translation, and translation is rarely a transaction with a blank page. Israeli gardens are what European gardens became under pressure, set into a Levantine bed that already knew the work of cultivation.

This continuity rests on a deeper foundation. In Jewish thought, the garden is never merely decorative. The Garden of Eden is not simply a lost paradise but a place of responsibility. Adam and Eve are placed there to work it and guard it, establishing a relationship with the earth defined by care and obligation. Their expulsion marks an entry into moral awareness, into a world where cultivation requires effort and judgment. The garden becomes both origin and horizon.

In the *Song of Songs*, gardens are charged with vitality and intimacy, filled with pomegranates and flowing water, where the boundary between the human and the sacred dissolves. The law of *Shmita*, which requires the land to rest every seventh year, resists exploitation and affirms the earth as a partner rather than a possession. In this tradition, to cultivate is to be answerable to the ground beneath one's feet.

Modern Israel carries these layers into a present shaped by both innovation and unresolved tension. The early builders of the state, many reared within European intellectual and agricultural traditions, sought to cultivate the land in ways that fused ancient obligation with modern aspiration. Gardens in Israel today range from memorial landscapes to botanical collections and community plots woven into urban neighborhoods. They are not merely ornamental. They are places where history, identity, and daily practice converge.

Since October 7, 2023, and through the wars in Gaza and Iran, their role has shifted into something rawer and more necessary. The soundscape of daily life has changed. Sirens, cellphone alerts, and the constant awareness of threat have become part of ordinary experience. Within this reality, gardens across the country have taken on a new function. They have become shelters.

To call them bomb shelters is not rhetorical excess. It captures precisely how these spaces absorb and soften surrounding pressure. The noise of conflict does

not disappear within a garden. But it does recede. In these spaces, people plant, tend, harvest, and watch as growth unfolds. These acts are modest, yet under conditions of instability, they carry exceptional weight.

Each seed placed in the soil asserts that the future exists. Each act of care stands against the logic of destruction.

These gardens also offer relief from internal strife. Israeli society has been marked by deep disagreements over the judiciary, governance, and identity. Those tensions do not vanish in a shared garden, but they are reframed. Cultivation demands attention and cooperation. It shifts focus from abstract conflict to concrete responsibility and creates a space where difference becomes bearable within a shared commitment to sustaining life.

War disrupts and fragments. It interrupts continuity and erodes what has been built. A garden moves in the opposite direction. It requires time, care, and a belief in renewal. Cerić is clear on this point: gardens do not resolve the crises that surround them. They respond to them, creating moments of stability without dissolving the forces beyond their boundaries.

In Israel today, that response carries particular weight. The pressures of security, the burden of history, and the intensity of political life make sustaining ordinary acts a form of resilience. The European dimension of Cerić's work sharpens this insight. The gardens he describes belong to a continent that Jews once inhabited, shaped, and were forced to leave. The Hebrew translation brings that history into quiet dialogue with the present.

Cerić's insight, forged in the upheaval of a 20th century European war, finds its echo in 21st century Israel. Any piece of land can become the ground of life. In a region where the ceasefire with Hezbollah can fracture overnight, where the understanding with Iran remains one provocation away from collapse, and where the wounds of October 7 remain open, the garden offers something quieter but essential: a space where memory and hope take root together, and where the future is not just imagined but cultivated. It is not an escape from history. It is one of the ways history is endured.

ESSAY 10

Israelis Don't Want War; They Want to Win Eurovision

Jewish News Syndicate (JNS), 11/5/2026. https://www.jns.org/opinion/sharon-pardo/israelis-dont-want-war-they-want-to-win-eurovision

As fragile ceasefires strain on the Iran, Gaza and Lebanon fronts, Israel remains in a state its citizens know all too well: not quite at war, not quite at peace, suspended between possible escalation and temporary stability.

And yet, in the midst of this uncertainty, many Israelis are already looking ahead to the next Eurovision Song Contest. For a few hours, it offers something rare: the feeling of normal life restored. Not strategy or survival – just songs, votes and the simple hope of winning.

From the outside, especially across much of Europe, Israelis are often portrayed as a people shaped by conflict, perhaps even suited to it. The assumption runs deep: that years of confrontation have made war part of Israeli identity, that resilience has curdled into appetite.

That reading is wrong.

After more than two years of war, Israelis are not rallying around conflict. The word "ceasefire" has taken on an ironic edge, a technical term that rarely translates into actual quiet.

This is not abstract geopolitics. In northern Israel, sirens interrupt the night. Work schedules dissolve into reserve duty. Parents instinctively calculate the distance from the classroom to the nearest shelter. The uncertainty is structural, woven into the week even when violence is not.

Beneath the headlines, a quieter truth accumulates: Israelis are not longing for escalation; they are longing for boredom.

Ask ordinary people what they want right now, and the answers are strikingly mundane. A full night of sleep. A workweek that unfolds as planned. Children at

school without the background hum of risk assessment. Even traffic has acquired a strange emotional value: gridlock means that the city is functioning and nobody is running for cover.

This is not a society that celebrates war. It is a society that endures it while fighting to preserve the texture of ordinary life.

The gap between this reality and the European perception reflects a deeper disagreement about security itself. Israelis evaluate threats by proximity and consequence. The actors involved are not distant abstractions, and their capabilities are not theoretical. Many Israelis look at Europe and see a continent that underestimates these dangers and places too much faith in diplomacy alone.

The critique can turn sharp. Some Israelis view Europe as politically naive, overly confident in institutional solutions and insufficiently attentive to long-term risk. They also point to what they see as contradictions: a continent that struggles with antisemitism in certain quarters while wrestling, uneasily, with tensions around Islam and immigration.

Yet this criticism coexists with something European observers rarely account for: a powerful and genuine affinity for Europe. Israelis travel there in large numbers. They follow its culture, music and sports with real devotion. European soccer clubs are household names from Haifa to Beersheva. And then there is Eurovision.

Eurovision in Israel is not background noise. It is a national event, something close to a civic ritual. Victories are commemorated. Losses are dissected. The contest offers what the news cycle seldom does: a sense of uncomplicated participation in European life, where the rules are clear, the outcome is finite, and the stakes are not entangled with survival.

Israel has won Eurovision four times. Each victory landed as more than a musical achievement. It was recognition. It was the continent's viewers and juries saying, however briefly and however improbably, you are one of us.

That hunger to compete, to be seen through creativity rather than conflict, to stand on a European stage for reasons that have nothing to do with war, speaks to something the security discourse consistently obscures. Israelis do not want to be defined by their enemies. They want to be known for something else entirely.

In this sense, Eurovision, which begins this week, is not an escape from Israeli reality. It is a statement about what that reality should look like.

This dual relationship with Europe – admiration and frustration, connection and criticism, the feeling of being simultaneously misjudged and drawn in – is central to understanding Israeli society. Israelis can question European foreign policy in the morning and spend the evening arguing about whether the Finnish entry deserved more points.

These things are not contradictory. They reflect the same impulse: the desire to belong to a shared world and the frustration of feeling misread within it.

Political differences sharpen this divide. While much of Europe views US President Donald Trump with skepticism, many Israelis judge him through a different lens shaped by regional security. The result can feel like parallel conversations about the same events.

Yet beneath all of it lies a shared foundation. Like Europeans, Israelis have built lives around routine. They work, raise families, follow sports, plan vacations and argue about things that do not involve survival.

War is not an identity. It is an interruption.

The longer this suspended condition persists, the more the fatigue shows. Not dramatic, not declarative, but steady and accumulating. It appears in conversations about sleep, in the relief when a night passes without sirens and alarms, in the shrinking capacity to plan beyond the near future.

Given the choice, Israelis would not choose war. They would choose to gather around a television, argue about songs and hope that when the votes are counted, Israel's name sits at the top of the scoreboard.

ESSAY 11

Israel Just United Europe Together to Oppose Settler Violence

The Jerusalem Post, 14/5/2026. https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-896046

Europe has institutions, treaties, commissions, and endless summits, yet it remains uncertain about its own political character. It struggles to define itself.

Is it a civilization, a market, a geopolitical power, a normative power, or simply a bureaucratic arrangement binding together nations with divergent histories and interests? The European Union (EU) speaks the language of values while operating according to the logic of procedure. It rarely acts quickly.

Yet this week, the EU Foreign Affairs Council achieved something remarkable: all 27 member states agreed on sanctions against violent Israeli settlers in the West Bank. Even Hungary, which for years shielded Israel from collective European pressure, gave its approval.

Israel's foreign relations failure

Henry Kissinger once remarked that Israel had no foreign policy, only domestic policy. The comment was cynical but perceptive. Israel often treats external criticism as secondary to coalition arithmetic and strategic questions as subordinate to political survival.

That habit is now yielding consequences far beyond Jerusalem.

Ironically, Israel has accomplished what generations of European leaders could not: it has united Europe around a coherent foreign policy position.

Not Russia, not China, not migration.

Europe found common purpose through opposition to settler violence in the West Bank. At a moment when the continent struggles to articulate what it stands for, it has become increasingly certain about what it rejects.

This is what scholars describe as “otherness.” Political communities sometimes define themselves less by a shared ethos than through contrast with an external figure representing what they refuse to become. Netanyahu’s Israel has assumed that role for Europe.

The continent may not fully agree on its binding principles. Still, it knows it does not stand for masked violent settlers torching homes, attacking Palestinian villages, and subverting any remaining possibility of separation between Israelis and Palestinians.

For years, European governments carefully distinguished criticism of settlement expansion from criticism of Israel itself. The distinction mattered deeply to European diplomacy. Opposition to settlements, officials insisted, was not opposition to the Jewish state. That line is now collapsing.

Settlement violence is no longer viewed as the work of isolated extremists. Across Europe, it is increasingly perceived as tolerated by the Netanyahu government and politically legitimized by some of the ministers within.

That is why the sanctions decision carries significance far beyond the individuals included on any list.

Sanctions are rarely just punitive instruments. They are political signals. They establish moral boundaries and create institutional momentum. Bureaucratic systems, once set in motion, rarely stop with an initial measure.

Today, the sanctions target violent settlers. Tomorrow, the debate may extend to ministers such as Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir, whose rhetoric is already widely regarded across Europe as racist. After that, the discussion could shift toward settlement products. From there, broader economic and diplomatic measures, once considered politically inconceivable, may enter the mainstream of European policy.

Europe coming together

The most portentous element in this story is not the sanctions themselves. It is the disappearance of Viktor Orban as Netanyahu's reliable shield within the EU. For years, Orban blocked or diluted collective measures against Israel. Hungary functioned as Jerusalem's veto in Brussels, and Israeli diplomacy became dependent on that arrangement. And that dependence is now exposed.

With Peter Magyar now in power, Budapest no longer obstructs European consensus. Israel now faces a Europe that is more internally cohesive and more willing to convert moral outrage into policy.

The danger is not only diplomatic isolation abroad, but strategic blindness at home. Israeli leaders continue to speak as though European criticism amounts to the symbolic posturing of weak states. That attitude fundamentally misreads the cumulative nature of international legitimacy.

Europe remains Israel's largest trading partner and one of its most important scientific and cultural partners. Alienating Europe carries tangible costs. Dismissing European opinion altogether risks pushing even moderate governments toward adversarial positions they might otherwise avoid.

The tragedy is that none of this is inevitable. Europe is not inherently hostile to Israel. Many Europeans retain genuine historical sympathy for the Jewish state and a profound awareness of Jewish suffering on the continent.

But sympathy is not unconditional. Guilt diplomacy cannot indefinitely override present realities. Images of settler violence, combined with inflammatory statements from senior Israeli ministers, are reshaping European perceptions faster than many Israelis appear to understand.

Israel still retains agency. It can enforce the rule of law against violent settlers. It can restrain ministers. It can demonstrate that state institutions remain stronger than ideological militias. Above all, it can recognize that domestic political expediency is wreaking strategic damage of historic magnitude.

Kissinger's observation now returns with renewed force. A country consumed by internal politics eventually loses control over its international standing. Coalition survival tactics in Jerusalem are reshaping Europe's geopolitical posture.

Decisions aimed at preserving a sitting government at all costs have produced consensus in Brussels.

Europe has found a unifying foreign policy language, and it found it through Israel. That should concern Israelis far more than any sanctions list. Because once a continent of this economic and political sees a country as its defining political other, reversing that perception becomes extraordinarily difficult.

And in politics, especially EU politics, institutional momentum matters more than intentions. Once the Brussels machinery begins moving, nobody can predict with confidence where it will end.

ESSAY 12

The Boycott of Israeli Academia

The Jerusalem Post Printed Edition, 28/5/2026, page 10.
The Jerusalem Post, 28/5/2026. https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-897476

A report published last week by Israel's Association of University Heads (VERA) documents a 150% rise in efforts to exclude Israeli institutions from Horizon Europe, the European Union's (EU) flagship research program.

More than 1,100 boycott complaints were recorded in six months alone. The authors warn that the damage may become irreversible without intervention.

The figures confirm what many of us have been experiencing quietly for almost three years. This is not simply pressure on Israeli universities; it is a sorting of scholars by passport, and it undermines the very principles European academia claims to defend.

I study Europe. For years, I taught students about reconciliation after war, democratic values, human rights, and the promise of intellectual exchange across borders. I wrote about Mediterranean relations and EU foreign policy. I believed that scholarship could transcend nationality and political conflict.

Then came October 7.

The Hamas massacre shattered Israeli society in ways that many outsiders struggle to grasp. The wars that followed deepened suffering across the region and fractured old certainties everywhere. Since then, another reality has taken shape, beyond missiles or demonstrations, but devastating in its own way: the quiet academic boycott of Israelis.

No academic journal editor writes that Israelis are unwelcome. No conference organizer issues a formal declaration of exclusion. Instead, it arrives through an endless sequence of small disappearances.

You submit an article to a European journal. Within minutes comes a desk rejection. Five minutes is apparently sufficient to determine that years of research are unworthy of peer review. The article may have nothing to do with Israel or the Middle East, but the answer is still immediate.

The discovery that every European colleague has been invited to an international project meeting except you is painful. A Horizon Europe research consortium that once welcomed Israeli participation suddenly becomes inaccessible. Colleagues who once spoke enthusiastically about cooperation now avoid association with Israeli researchers and institutions altogether.

Then come the personal betrayals, which cut far deeper than institutional exclusion.

In one case, a colleague for whom I once wrote a recommendation letter so he could avoid compulsory military service in Greece later joined protests where shouts of “Hamas, Hamas, Hamas, all the Jews to the gas” could be heard. Another scholar, whose immigration process I once supported, has circulated social media posts glorifying Hezbollah.

Others adopt more polite forms of rejection. Senior scholars decline to write recommendation letters for Israeli colleagues seeking promotion. They are suddenly “too busy.” Some are more direct: they cannot support academics connected, in their words, to genocide.

There is little room for political complexity or individual conviction. It does not matter that many Israeli academics have spent years opposing their own government, protesting the wars, the occupation, settler violence, and policies they believe are destroying both the Israeli and the Palestinian future.

I have attended conferences where an Israeli academic presenting a paper unrelated to the conflict was interrupted by someone shouting “genocider.” Biography, politics, and moral conviction disappear instantly beneath a national label.

Eventually, the external boycott becomes internalized. You stop sending articles to leading journals because rejection feels predetermined. You stop applying to academic conferences because humiliation becomes exhausting. Self-censorship gradually replaces ambition.

Yet something unexpected also happens.

Freed from the illusion that the academy stands apart from politics, many of us reconnect with society itself. We work with communities harmed by violence, join efforts against extremist settlers attacking Palestinians in the West Bank, and fight policies carried out in our names but against our consciences.

And amid the hostility, unexpected solidarities emerge.

Iranian scholars living abroad have reached out with compassion and encouragement. They speak openly against authoritarianism in Tehran and destructive policies in Jerusalem alike, insisting that a different future remains possible. Colleagues abroad sent kind messages after Iranian missiles struck the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev campus, where I teach.

Under a boycott, you discover who your real friends are. You also discover something uncomfortable about Europe.

Europe’s academic institutions often pride themselves on openness, dialogue, and intellectual pluralism. Yet too many European academic spaces now operate according to an unreliable moral litmus test.

Israelis are judged not by what they write, teach, or believe, but by nationality alone. Academic communities that rightly insist on distinguishing between governments and citizens increasingly fail to make the distinction when the citizen holds an Israeli passport.

Europe knows from its own history the dangers of turning intellectual life into a test of political purity.

This damages far more than Israeli academia. Science and scholarship depend on exchange. Excluding Israeli researchers harms European innovation, Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, and the global circulation and synergy of ideas. Israel remains deeply connected to Europe economically, culturally, and socially.

The VERA report warns that Israeli universities could find themselves permanently outside the world's most prestigious scientific networks. Yet the damage would ripple beyond Israel. Europe's research institutions weaken themselves when political conformity becomes a prerequisite for intellectual legitimacy.

One day, the wars will subside. Some of the colleagues who remained silent today will reappear, proposing edited volumes, conference panels, and collaborative research grants, and they will behave as though nothing happened.

Perhaps that is the way institutions survive. Institutions forget quickly. Individuals do not.

Academic communities, like societies themselves, are ultimately judged not only by whom they exclude in moments of anger, but by whom they are willing to hear again once the anger fades.

Still, despair is a luxury the Middle East cannot afford. The boycott has forced many Israeli scholars out of academic enclosure and into deeper engagement with society. It has made some of us better teachers, more attentive citizens, and more morally serious human beings, precisely because exclusion compelled us to reconsider what academic life is for.

Galileo Galilei is said to have whispered after his trial, "E pur si muove." And yet it moves. The earth continued to move despite denial and persecution. Perhaps we can as well.

ESSAY 13

Europe's Obsession with Israel

EURACTIV, 14/6/2026. https://www.euractiv.com/opinion/europes-obsession-with-israel/

Few countries occupy as much space in the European Union diplomatic imagination as Israel. EU institutions devote extraordinary attention to Israeli policies, actions, and conflicts, often placing them at the center of diplomatic discussions in a way that is difficult to explain by Israel's size, power, or formal relationship with the Union.

This disproportionate focus raises important questions. Does the EU apply its diplomatic scrutiny consistently across different countries and conflicts? And if not, what are the consequences for its credibility and influence in the Middle East? At the same time, Israel's growing tendency to dismiss the EU as strategically irrelevant may be creating problems of its own.

A new study by the Jewish People Policy Institute (JPPI) sheds empirical light on these questions. Researchers analyzed more than 24,000 official statements, press releases, and diplomatic communications issued by the European External Action Service (EEAS) between 2017 and April 2026. Of these, 895 dealt directly with Israel. The study also examined how Israel was portrayed in EU diplomatic discourse.

The findings are striking and serve as a warning to both Brussels and Jerusalem. Israel occupies an unusually prominent place in the Union's diplomatic imagination. It accounted for approximately 4% of all official EEAS diplomatic statements during the period examined. That level of attention is not explained by Israel's formal relationship with the Union – Israel is neither an EU member nor a candidate, and is not among the world's major powers. Yet it commands attention from Brussels far beyond what its size and formal status would suggest.

The tone of that attention is equally revealing. Across the entire period, 38% of EEAS statements concerning Israel were negative, 49% were neutral, and only 13% were positive. Following the October 7 massacre, the balance shifted even

further: negative statements rose from 29% before the attack to nearly 46% afterwards; positive statements fell from almost 20% to just 8%.

Criticism of Israel is neither illegitimate nor surprising. Democracies are scrutinised because they are expected to uphold democratic values, and Israel should not be beyond examination. The question is not whether Israel should be criticised. The question is whether similar standards are applied consistently across the international system.

The comparative findings raise serious doubts. Iran received the most negative treatment among the countries examined, largely because of its military cooperation with Russia and its broader role in regional instability. Turkey presents a different case. Despite years of democratic erosion, restrictions on freedom of expression, and mounting tensions with European capitals, roughly three-quarters of official EEAS statements concerning Turkey were neutral, mostly focused on technical matters connected to its candidacy for EU membership.

The most revealing comparison is Qatar, for which more than two-thirds of European statements were positive; negative references were almost nonexistent. This is despite the "Qatargate affair," which raised serious questions about foreign influence within the European Parliament. That controversy barely registered in the official rhetoric examined by the researchers.

The contrast is difficult to ignore: a democratic state fighting a war triggered by the largest massacre of Jews since the Holocaust receives sustained scrutiny and intensifying criticism, while authoritarian actors are often treated with conspicuous caution or leniency.

This inconsistency is not merely a public relations problem. It undermines the EU's ability to present itself as a credible and impartial actor in the Middle East. For decades, European leaders have sought a central role in efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Yet influence depends on trust, and trust depends on consistency. By applying visibly different standards to different actors, the EU weakens its own claim to be an indispensable diplomatic broker in the region.

The JPPI study also reveals a widening intellectual gap between Brussels and Jerusalem. More than half of all EEAS statements concerning Israel included references to the two-state solution or the establishment of a Palestinian state.

The problem is not that the EU continues to support a two-state outcome; many serious people still regard it as the only viable long-term framework. The problem is that EU diplomacy often invokes it as if October 7 did not fundamentally alter Israeli threat perceptions. A formula that does not address these perceptions will not persuade the Israeli public, whatever its diplomatic pedigree.

Yet the study's most important conclusion may not be that the EU talks too much about Israel. It may be that Israel talks too little to Europe. While the EU remains intensely focused on Israel, Israel has largely stopped paying attention to Europe. Since October 7, Israeli diplomacy has concentrated, understandably, on Washington, regional security challenges, and the expansion of the Abraham Accords.

These are legitimate priorities. But they have come at the expense of sustained engagement with EU institutions, European governments, media, universities, and policy communities.

This neglect carries risks. The EU remains Israel's largest trading partner. Approximately one-third of Israel's trade in goods is conducted with EU member states. The EU is also Israel's most important partner in research, innovation, and higher education. No alternative partner offers Israel access to a comparable ecosystem of research funding, academic collaboration, and technological networks.

At a time when economic competitiveness depends increasingly on scientific excellence and technological innovation, relations with the EU are not a diplomatic luxury. They are a strategic asset. But many Israelis have come to regard Europe as a lost cause, assuming that European attitudes are fixed, EU institutions are irreversibly hostile, and investment in the relationship is unlikely to yield results. This is not realism; it is resignation.

Foreign policy is not about engaging only with those who already agree with you. It is about shaping debates, building coalitions, and defending national interests even in difficult environments. When Israel withdraws from the European arena, others fill the vacuum. When it stops trying to influence European discourse, it should not be surprised when that discourse evolves without Israeli input.

The EU should ask why Israel occupies so much space in its diplomatic imagination and whether that hyper focus reflects balanced diplomacy or an entrenched double standard. Israel should ask why the Union occupies so little space in its own strategic thinking and whether it can afford to neglect its most important economic, scientific, and technological partner.

Neither Brussels nor Jerusalem benefits from the current trajectory. The EU risks its credibility as a diplomatic actor. Israel risks its influence, its economic interests, and its scientific future in a relationship it cannot afford to neglect.

Both outcomes are avoidable, but only if both Israel and the EU begin treating this relationship with the seriousness it deserves.

ESSAY 14

Why Slovenia Matters for Israel and the Jewish World

Jewish News Syndicate (JNS), 15/6/2026. https://www.jns.org/opinion/sharon-pardo/why-slovenia-matters-for-israel-and-the-jewish-world

Columbus Jewish News, 15/6/2026. https://www.columbusjewishnews.com/jns/why-slovenia-matters-for-israel-and-the-jewish-world/article_1e5dd93f-d774-59b9-a32f-0983218940bb.html

Few political developments in Europe this year are likely to attract less international attention than the formation of a new government in Slovenia. Yet for Israel, for Jewish communities across Europe and for those committed to confronting antisemitism, the political transformation underway in Ljubljana may carry consequences far beyond the borders of this small European Union member state.

Against considerable odds, veteran politician Janez Janša succeeded in returning to the office of prime minister despite his party not emerging as the largest force in the March election.

Many observers believed that his chances of leading another government had effectively disappeared. Through persistence, strategic judgment and successful

coalition negotiations, he accomplished what most regarded as improbable and assembled a parliamentary majority. His achievement ended months of political uncertainty and brought to power a coalition expected to pursue a markedly different course in foreign affairs.

The implications for Israel became apparent almost immediately. Within hours of the new administration taking office, Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar announced that Israel would open a resident embassy in Ljubljana. The decision carries significance far beyond diplomatic representation. It reflects Jerusalem's assessment that Slovenia is entering a new era and that meaningful opportunities exist to strengthen relations after several difficult years.

The timing could hardly be more striking. Only days earlier, an Israir flight was unable to land in Ljubljana, an episode that quickly became symbolic of a broader deterioration in bilateral relations. In recent years, Slovenia has increasingly positioned itself among the most critical voices toward Israel within the European Union, recognizing a Palestinian state, supporting initiatives sharply critical of Israeli policy and adopting positions that many officials in Jerusalem viewed as persistently unbalanced.

What is unfolding in Ljubljana represents far more than a routine transfer of authority. It signals the return of a political leader whose views on Israel, Jewish communities and antisemitism have long distinguished him from many European counterparts.

Janša has long been regarded as one of Europe's most vocal supporters of Israel. Throughout his career, he has defended Israel's right to security and promoted closer relations between the two countries, as well as maintained dialogue with Jewish organizations in Europe and the United States. Unlike most European leaders who approach issues involving Israel with visible caution, Janša has repeatedly demonstrated a willingness to articulate his position clearly and publicly.

Equally significant is his record on antisemitism. At a time when anti-Jewish incidents have increased across the continent, he has consistently condemned attacks against Jewish communities and spoken in defense of Jewish life in Europe. He has also argued that such hatred has no place in democratic societies

and has emphasized the importance of preserving Jewish heritage, memory and communal security.

This matters because the challenges confronting European Jewry in the aftermath of October 7 extend far beyond questions of physical security. Across the continent, many Jewish communities have experienced a sharp rise in hostility, violence and social exclusion. The boundary between legitimate criticism of Israeli government policy and prejudice against Jews has become increasingly difficult to discern in public discourse. In some quarters, hostility toward Israel has provided a new vocabulary for old antisemitic ideas, while the European Jewish community has found itself blamed for events taking place in the Middle East.

Against this backdrop, the emergence of a government that openly values strong relations with Israel and treats the struggle against antisemitism as a democratic responsibility rather than a symbolic gesture sends a powerful message. It affirms that support for Jewish communities is not merely a matter of historical remembrance but an ongoing commitment to democratic resilience.

Although Slovenia's Jewish community is among the smallest in Europe, numbering fewer than 500 people, the significance of this political shift extends far beyond the country's borders. Across Europe, Jewish communities pay close attention not only to government policies but also to political tone and moral leadership. Decisions taken in national capitals often resonate far beyond their immediate context and shape the broader environment in which Jewish life in Europe develops. When an EU member state strengthens ties with Israel while simultaneously emphasizing the imperative to combat antisemitism, it influences conversations taking place throughout the Union.

The appointment of Tone Kajzer as foreign minister reinforces this direction. A veteran diplomat with extensive international experience and strong transatlantic credentials, he has engaged throughout his career with Jewish organizations and participated in talks concerning relations between Slovenia, Israel and Jewish communities. Pragmatic by temperament and focused on Slovenian national interests, his outlook nevertheless aligns with a foreign policy that values close cooperation with the United States, democratic allies and the wider Western world.

For Israel, the significance of Slovenia's transformation should not be measured solely through the lens of bilateral relations. Within the European Union, every member state possesses a voice capable of influencing debates on the union's foreign policy, sanctions, international resolutions and relations with Jerusalem. A government in Ljubljana prepared to pursue a more balanced approach could help reshape discussions that have long been dominated by highly critical perspectives.

No one should expect Slovenia to become an unquestioning supporter of every Israeli decision. Membership in the European Union requires cooperation, compromise and careful diplomacy. There remains, however, a profound difference between constructive criticism and systematic hostility, and a meaningful distinction between governments that treat Jewish concerns as secondary and those that recognize antisemitism as a genuine threat to democratic values.

The political story itself carries a broader lesson. Elections alone do not determine outcomes in parliamentary democracies. Leadership, coalition-building and strategic judgment remain decisive. Although Janša did not secure the largest share of seats, he succeeded where his rivals failed by assembling a governing majority and presenting a compelling alternative vision for Slovenia's future.

Whether this government fulfills its promises remains to be seen. Yet the early indicators point clearly in one direction. The rapid Israeli decision to establish an embassy in Ljubljana, the return of a prime minister known for his support of Israel and the appointment of a foreign minister with a strongly trans-Atlantic outlook all signal a genuine shift in orientation.

For Israel and for the Jewish world, Slovenia's political transformation may ultimately mark the beginning of a new chapter. Whether that promise is fulfilled remains to be seen, but the signals emerging from Ljubljana suggest a government more inclined to engage constructively with Israel and more attentive to concerns affecting Jewish communities.

ESSAY 15

Israel Is Engaging Yesterday's Europe

Jewish News Syndicate (JNS), 11/7/2026. https://www.jns.org/opinion/sharon-pardo/israel-is-engaging-yesterdays-europe

When European Union foreign-policy chief Kaja Kallas wrote on X after meeting Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan that Ankara was "a key partner on security, migration and energy," praised its role protecting NATO's eastern flank, and voiced hope for closer relations between Brussels and Ankara, Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar answered within hours.

Kallas's message, he noted, said nothing about Turkey's deteriorating democratic record: mounting pressure on opposition politicians, journalists and peaceful protesters. "A masterclass in hypocrisy," he called it.

Whether Sa'ar's criticism was fair is not the central question. The exchange became the latest episode in a relationship between Jerusalem and Brussels that has grown steadily more strained. But focusing on the question of double standards risks missing something more consequential, something that has drawn almost no attention: Israel is still engaging an outdated image of Europe.

Just days earlier, the European Union published the spring 2026 Standard Eurobarometer. The findings deserved more notice than another spat on social media. A majority of Europeans, 51%, now trust the European Union, three points higher than in the autumn 2025 survey. Some 73% see it as a place of stability in a troubled world, and 81% support a common defense and security policy among member states.

The significance of these findings extends well beyond public opinion. Trust is also a source of political legitimacy. Institutions that enjoy growing public confidence acquire greater authority to act, both internally and internationally. For Israel, this means that the European Union is not merely a forum for familiar diplomatic arguments; it is becoming a more legitimate and more consequential actor.

This suggests that Israeli thinking about the union still rests on assumptions many Europeans no longer hold. That view once made perfect sense. For much of the past decade, those assumptions closely reflected the union's political trajectory.

The sovereign debt crisis exposed deep economic strain. The refugee crisis laid bare sharp political divisions. Brexit seemed to confirm an integration project heading toward irreversible decline. Populist parties gained ground across the continent, while constant disputes among member states reinforced the image of a bloc too fragmented to operate with purpose. Years of this encouraged Israeli policymakers to view the European Union primarily as a divided economic club, rather than as an increasingly consequential geopolitical actor.

That is not the entity taking shape now.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine reshaped the course of European integration. Instead of fragmenting, the European Union coordinated sweeping sanctions against Russia; financed military assistance to Ukraine; expanded defense investment; diversified energy supplies; and invested heavily in industrial resilience and advanced technologies. Doubts about future American leadership have only accelerated this process.

The Eurobarometer survey shows that this transformation extends well beyond Brussels. EU citizens increasingly support it. They recognize that security, migration, technological competition, climate change and geopolitical instability require collective European action.

That reality should matter greatly in Jerusalem.

Israeli foreign policy continues to devote much of its attention to bilateral relations with European capitals. Those relationships remain indispensable. Germany, Italy, Greece, Czechia, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and other member states will always remain essential partners.

But today's European Union can no longer be understood through national capitals alone. Many of the decisions shaping Israel's strategic environment are increasingly negotiated and adopted in Brussels. Trade policy, Horizon Europe research funding, AI, digital regulation, sanctions, environmental standards, industrial strategy and expanding areas of foreign policy now emerge from common EU institutions.

This is one of the most important transformations in European politics over the past two decades. Israeli diplomacy has not fully caught up.

Israel continues to approach the union primarily through bilateral channels, even as Brussels acquires greater influence over issues that directly affect Israeli economic, scientific, technological and diplomatic interests. The result is a widening gap between the Europe that Israel believes it is engaging and the Europe that increasingly shapes decisions affecting Israel's interests.

The recent suspension of Israeli contacts with Kaja Kallas illustrates this broader challenge. Whatever its immediate diplomatic logic, reducing engagement with Brussels does not diminish the union's influence. It merely limits Israel's opportunities to influence decisions before they are taken.

This has become particularly evident since October 2023. Disagreements over Gaza, humanitarian assistance, violent settlers, international law and the prospects for peace have strained relations between Israel and several European institutions. At the same time, antisemitism has surged across Europe, leaving Jewish communities increasingly vulnerable to violence and hostility generated by events unfolding thousands of kilometers away.

These developments have understandably generated deep frustration in Israel. Frustration, however, is not a strategy.

Many Israelis now dismiss Brussels as politically irrelevant. The Eurobarometer survey suggests precisely the opposite. Institutions that enjoy rising public confidence tend to gain political authority rather than lose it. Governments become more willing to act through them, and international partners have even greater reason to engage them seriously. As the European Union assumes a larger role in security, defense, technology and economic policy, Israel has a greater interest in engaging Brussels rather than bypassing it.

None of this requires accepting every European criticism. Democracies disagree, particularly during war. Israel has every right to challenge positions it considers unfair, inconsistent or detached from regional realities; however, disagreement is not a substitute for understanding.

A more effective Israeli approach would not abandon bilateral diplomacy. It would complement it with a more serious Brussels strategy. That means sustained engagement with the European External Action Service, the European

Commission, the High Representative's office and the European Parliament; treating EU regulatory, research and sanctions debates as strategic files; and entering conversations early to shape outcomes rather than merely react to them.

The case for doing so is practical, not sentimental. The European Union remains Israel's largest trading partner, accounting for nearly a third of Israel's total goods trade. Its research programs provide Israeli universities, scientists and industry with unparalleled opportunities for cooperation. Israeli innovation strengthens Europe in cybersecurity, health care, agriculture, water technology, climate adaptation and AI. These shared interests have become more important, not less.

Too much of the Israeli debate still reflects the union of the Brexit era rather than the union that exists today. Europe has become more integrated in strategically important fields, more confident in its institutions and more willing to act collectively. It's becoming more cohesive and more confident. These changes are already reshaping the continent.

Successful foreign policy begins with an accurate understanding of political realities. The costliest strategic mistakes rarely result from underestimating adversaries. More often, they stem from misreading partners.

The latest exchange between Gideon Sa'ar and Kaja Kallas will soon fade from the headlines. The larger strategic challenge will remain.

ESSAY 16

A Hotter Europe Needs Israeli Science

The Jerusalem Post, 12/7/2026. https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-902207

Europe is discovering what Israel has long known: extreme heat is no longer an occasional emergency. It is becoming part of the continent's new normal.

The recent heat dome that swept across the continent pushed temperatures to record levels, strained electricity grids, disrupted transport, and forced governments to issue public health warnings. Meteorologists warn that more major heat events are likely to follow. What was once exceptional is rapidly becoming routine.

For decades, European climate policy focused primarily on slowing global warming. The Green Deal became the European Union's (EU) flagship project for reducing emissions and achieving climate neutrality. Those ambitions remain essential. But Europe now faces an equally urgent challenge. It must also learn how to adapt to a hotter world.

That challenge creates an opportunity to rethink one dimension of the relationship between Israel and the EU.

The conversation between Brussels and Jerusalem is usually dominated by disagreements over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and wider regional politics. Those disagreements will continue.

Climate adaptation, however, offers a different agenda, one driven not by political division but by shared necessity. Extreme heat does not recognize borders or ideology. It tests farmers, physicians, engineers, urban planners, and governments alike.

This is where science diplomacy should take center stage.

Israel has spent generations building a modern state under conditions of chronic heat, scarce water, and recurring drought. Meeting those challenges required sustained investment in scientific research, technological innovation, and close cooperation among universities, government agencies, research institutes, and private industry.

Water illustrates the point. Today, roughly 80% of Israel's drinking water comes from desalinated seawater. Combined with one of the world's highest rates of wastewater reuse and decades of research on water-efficient agriculture, Israel has developed expertise that is increasingly relevant far beyond the Middle East.

Few European countries have built a national water system that combines desalination, wastewater recycling, and efficient water management on a comparable scale. That experience cannot simply be copied, but it can be studied, adapted, and improved through joint research.

Israeli researchers have also advanced drought-resistant crops, precision irrigation, renewable energy technologies, climate monitoring systems, and innovative approaches to managing scarce natural resources. These achievements belong to no single institution. They reflect decades of work across Israel's universities, public laboratories, research centers, and technology sector.

Europe, for its part, brings equally important strengths. Its universities lead the world in climate science, environmental regulation, sustainable architecture, renewable energy, and urban planning. European institutions have also produced some of the world's most ambitious climate legislation.

This is not a story of one side teaching the other. It is a partnership built on complementary strengths. Europe has become a global leader in reducing emissions. Israel has accumulated practical experience in adapting to heat and water scarcity. Together they can develop solutions that will benefit societies far beyond either region.

This is precisely the kind of partnership that Brussels and Jerusalem have spent decades building through scientific cooperation and research frameworks such as the Horizon Europe research program. These programs exist because both sides recognized that knowledge is among the strongest foundations of a durable relationship.

Yet today a striking contradiction has emerged.

At the precise moment Europe most needs climate-adaptation expertise, political pressure is growing in parts of the Union to suspend or restrict Israel's participation in Horizon Europe. European governments are fully entitled to debate Israeli policies. But Europe will not strengthen its future by weakening scientific cooperation.

Climate change will not wait for political consensus. Every barrier to joint research reduces Europe's ability to confront challenges ranging from water security and food production to energy resilience and public health. Excluding Israeli researchers would not slow global warming. It would simply deny the EU access to expertise that could help it adapt more effectively.

The historical dimension

There is also a deeper historical dimension to this story.

Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, believed that Israel's future would be shaped in the Negev desert. He saw the desert not simply as territory to cultivate but as a laboratory where science and innovation would determine whether communities could flourish under arid conditions.

Almost 80 years later, that vision has acquired unexpected relevance. As Europe confronts longer droughts, more frequent wildfires, shrinking reservoirs, and increasingly dangerous summers, many of the questions Israeli scientists have explored for decades are becoming European questions as well.

None of this suggests that Israel has solved climate change. It has not. Israel continues to face rising temperatures and growing environmental pressures of its own. But experience matters, especially when it is shared with partners confronting similar realities.

For too long, relations between Israel and the EU have been viewed almost exclusively through the prism of political disagreement. A warming climate offers an opportunity to strengthen another pillar of the relationship, one built on scientific excellence, practical cooperation, and shared interests.

The next chapter in Israel-Europe relations may therefore be written not only in diplomatic meetings but also in laboratories, research centers, and university partnerships, where progress is measured by discovery rather than political rhetoric.

Europe is only beginning to learn what it means to live in a hotter world. Israel has been learning that lesson for generations. In a warming world, knowledge may prove to be the most valuable bridge between them.

ESSAY 17

Europe, Israel, and the Medical Record of a Nation

The Jerusalem Post, 21/7/2026. https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-903136

Last week, I spent part of a morning visiting four pharmacies to collect my father's regular medications.

It was an ordinary family errand, the kind countless households run without a second thought. Yet by the time I reached the final counter, I was listening less to my own list than to the medication names being repeated around me.

Cipralex (escitalopram) for depression and anxiety. Bondormin (brotizolam) for severe insomnia. Lipitor (atorvastatin) to lower cholesterol. Vector (valsartan) for high blood pressure.

Different faces, different ailments. Yet by the fourth pharmacy, the names had stopped sounding like unrelated prescriptions. Heard together, they suggested a kind of national medical record.

No four pharmacies can diagnose a country. But they can offer a glimpse of the hidden toll of prolonged conflict: a burden that draws far less notice than combat, statecraft, or parliamentary debate.

Israelis have grown used to measuring the price of conflict in familiar ways. We follow the fate of the hostages. We count the dead and the wounded. We track economic losses and the shifting fronts. These are the visible scars.

Far less attention is paid to the damage that accumulates quietly inside the human body.

Since October 2023, the lives of many Israelis have been measured not only by calendars but by sirens, mobilizations, funerals, evacuations, and the anxious wait for the next emergency.

What began with the deadliest attack on Jews since the Holocaust evolved into months of reserve duty, repeated missile barrages, mass displacement, wars in Gaza and Lebanon, two military operations against Iran, and an almost uninterrupted state of national emergency.

Wars shape foreign policy. Long wars reshape societies.

The European debate has become sharply attuned to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's policies. It has devoted far less attention to the Israeli society that has been transformed by the years of conflict in which those policies have unfolded.

That quieter dimension of Israeli life rarely enters the broader conversation. Instead, much of Europe's debate about Israel revolves around the occupied territories, settler violence, humanitarian law, military operations, trade measures, research cooperation, and targeted sanctions.

These are legitimate issues, and every democracy at war should expect scrutiny. Yet the intensity of these debates can sometimes obscure the society that lives beyond them.

Beneath the headlines are millions of Israelis who go to work each morning, take children to school, care for elderly parents, and search for fragments of ordinary life while uncertainty has become a permanent companion. One can strongly oppose decisions made by the Israeli government while also recognizing the psychological burden carried by Israeli society.

These positions are not incompatible. To recognize the wounds carried by Israeli civilians is not to deny the suffering of Palestinians. It is to resist a politics in which

empathy is treated as a limited resource. Compassion for civilians should never depend on agreement over policy.

Perhaps this helps explain why Israelis and Europeans so often speak past one another.

EU institutions and much of the European public debate tend to interpret Israel through the lenses of international and humanitarian law, diplomacy, and statecraft. Israelis, by contrast, experience the consequences in their homes, workplaces, schools, hospitals, and neighborhood pharmacies.

The same events arrive in Brussels as questions of policy and in Beersheba as questions of the pulse.

Beyond the pharmacy counter

The European Union was built to free its member states from the cycle of war that had scarred the continent for centuries. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine shattered the assumption that large-scale interstate conflict had become a relic of Europe's past. Across the continent, governments once again speak of deterrence, defense, and rearmament.

Yet for most Europeans, war remains something observed just beyond their borders rather than woven into the fabric of everyday life. For Israelis, it is part of daily existence. That difference shapes more than foreign policy. It shapes how societies perceive risk, define security, and understand what it means to live a normal life.

The EU will continue debating Israel's policies, and rightly so. But if it wishes to understand the society it critiques, it must also look beyond government offices in Jerusalem and diplomatic briefings. That understanding begins not only in the corridors of government but also in rehabilitation wards, psychiatric clinics, emergency rooms, and yes, even in neighborhood pharmacies.

If prolonged conflict has created a shared challenge, it has also created common ground. Despite profound disagreements, Israel and Europe continue to work together in medicine, trauma care, mental health, and biomedical research.

At a time when calls have grown in parts of Europe to restrict Israel's participation in European research frameworks, including Horizon Europe, policymakers should take special care not to weaken civilian medical, trauma, mental-health, and biomedical partnerships.

These efforts address shared human challenges that transcend politics. They are among the few areas in which cooperation benefits both societies, regardless of their political differences.

As I carried my father's medication home, I realized that the names I had heard throughout the morning were telling a story that extended far beyond the pharmacy counter.

Historians will record the battles, the ceasefires, and the treaties. Political scientists, international relations specialists, and legal scholars will debate strategy, deterrence, and international law. They should.

But another archive exists, one that rarely appears in history books. It is written not in official statements or military reports, but in the prescriptions that pass quietly from pharmacist to patient each day.

I walked into those four pharmacies to collect medication for my father. I walked out thinking about a country. What I heard that morning was not evidence of a nation growing weaker. It was a reminder that the deepest wounds of war are not always visible.

Long after the sirens fall silent and the headlines fade, conflict leaves its mark on hearts, minds, and bodies. That may prove to be its longest afterlife.

ESSAY 18

Israelis Are Angry at Europe, Yet Still Drawn to It

The Jerusalem Post Printed Edition, 5/8/2026, page 10.

Why Israelis Still Want Europe Despite Growing Political Tensions with the EU – Opinion – The Jerusalem Post, 5/8/2026. https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-904555

Israelis have rarely been more critical of Europe. Since the Hamas-led terrorist attacks on October 7, 2023, relations between Israel and several European Union member states have entered one of their most difficult periods in recent memory.

Disagreements over Gaza, humanitarian access, settlements, settler violence, international law, and recognition of a Palestinian state have deepened political tensions.

At the same time, Jewish communities across Europe have faced a severe resurgence of antisemitic violence, heightening Israeli anxieties about the continent and exposing a profound challenge to the EU's democratic values.

Yet Israelis continue to be drawn to Europe. Demand for citizenship in EU member states remains substantial and has increased in several countries. European universities continue to attract Israeli students. Horizon Europe – the EU's funding program for research and innovation – remains highly valued by Israeli scientists.

The EU remains Israel's largest trading partner, and millions of Israelis travel across the continent each year because it still represents opportunity, stability, and openness.

The annual publication of the Henley Passport Index helps illuminate this apparent contradiction. Governments celebrate incremental gains in the rankings, travelers compare visa-free access, and headlines announce which passport has become the world's most powerful.

The index measures the privileges attached to citizenship, not the desire to acquire it. But read alongside naturalization patterns, it points toward an overlooked measure of soft power: the attraction political communities exert on outsiders.

Viewed through this lens, the EU's greatest source of international influence lies largely outside the remit of its foreign ministries. It is embedded in institutions Europeans have spent decades building. If foreign policy is ultimately about shaping the preferences of others, then Europe's strongest instrument is not diplomacy alone but the enduring attraction of the European project itself. The Israeli case illustrates this with unusual clarity.

The attraction extends beyond economics and education. Israeli footballers aspire to play in Europe's leading leagues, Israeli clubs measure success by qualification for European competitions, and many Israelis follow European football closely. Sport, like science, higher education, and culture, projects influence without intending to do so. It succeeds because people associate excellence, opportunity, and prestige with European institutions.

Europe's diplomatic standing among many Israelis may have weakened. Its institutional attraction has not. The two have moved in opposite directions.

This divergence raises a broader question about how international influence should be measured. International relations traditionally emphasizes military power, economic leverage, alliances, and diplomacy. Joseph Nye, the American political scientist, challenged this understanding by arguing that attraction constitutes an independent source of soft power. Yet attraction is notoriously difficult to observe. Opinion polls fluctuate, and official rhetoric often reflects immediate politics as much as deeper preferences.

Citizenship tells a different story. Applying for citizenship requires time, money, and often years of legal effort. Not every application expresses admiration for the country issuing the passport. Some are plainly instrumental – an insurance policy, a route to study or employment, or a means of preserving mobility. But even instrumental demand rests on confidence that the laws and institutions behind that citizenship will continue to protect the rights it confers.

Applications, therefore, reveal something opinion polls cannot: they demonstrate that people are willing to invest years of effort to become members of a political

community. Few indicators provide a clearer behavioral measure of institutional attraction.

Debates about the EU's global role often overlook the strategic significance of this process. Discussion usually centers on defense spending, strategic autonomy, sanctions, and foreign policy coordination.

These questions matter, but they can obscure the EU's most durable comparative advantage. Its universities educate future political, scientific, and business leaders. Its courts provide legal certainty. Its research institutions sustain international collaboration. Its single market, cultural industries, sporting competitions, and freedom of movement create an ecosystem of attraction that no foreign ministry could design, and no public diplomacy campaign could reproduce.

Political community

For Israelis, this attraction persists despite genuine political disagreement. An Israeli may strongly oppose the policies of a particular EU member state while continuing to admire European universities, scientific institutions, legal systems, sporting culture, and civic freedoms. Governments and diplomatic positions change. Institutional legitimacy accumulates over generations and erodes far more slowly.

For many Israelis, the attraction also carries a historical dimension. Recovering citizenship stripped from parents or grandparents through persecution, expulsion, or genocide may represent more than administrative convenience. It can also reflect confidence in Europe's effort to confront its past through democratic institutions and the rule of law – and in the ability of political communities to rebuild legitimacy across generations.

The implications extend beyond Europe. In an era defined by hard power and economic coercion, institutional attraction remains a strategic resource. Governments rise and fall, and diplomatic crises pass. Institutions that attract students, researchers, investors, entrepreneurs, athletes, artists, and future citizens generate influence that outlasts political cycles.

The Israeli case, therefore, offers a broader lesson about statecraft. Military strength deters. Economic power shapes incentives. Diplomacy manages crises.

Attraction creates a form of voluntary association that coercion cannot. That makes institutional legitimacy not merely a feature of good governance but a strategic asset.

Despite political tensions, antisemitism, and repeated predictions of European decline, many Israelis continue to seek citizenship in EU member states and participate in Europe's academic, scientific, economic, cultural, and sporting life. That paradox suggests that Europe's greatest foreign policy achievement lies not in what it says to the world but in the political community it has built.

In an age of geopolitical competition, few forms of international influence are more enduring than a society that others still choose to join.

ESSAY 19

Iceland, the EU and Israel

Jerusalem News Syndicate (JNS), 6/8/2026. https://www.jns.org/opinion/sharon-pardo/iceland-the-eu-and-israel

Israel Today, 7/8/2026. https://www.israeltoday.co.il/read/iceland-the-eu-and-israel/?mc_cid=ae7577b871&mc_eid=1c8441a232

Icelanders will vote on August 29 about whether to resume accession negotiations with the European Union. If the talks are renewed and concluded, membership itself would be put to voters in a second referendum.

For the first time in more than a decade, Iceland's suspended accession process has returned to the center of national politics. Much of the debate has focused on fisheries, monetary policy and economic sovereignty. Yet another question deserves attention: What does it mean to seek membership in a union founded not only on a common market, but also on shared democratic principles?

That question first occurred to me while researching a book on the early history of Israel's relations with the European integration project. In Israeli diplomatic telegrams from the 1950s, I found an unexpected exchange with Icelandic

diplomats. Their enthusiasm for relations with the young Jewish state was striking.

The Icelanders saw cooperation with Israel as the natural course for two small democracies with strong social democratic traditions seeking partners in a changing Europe. Nothing in those documents suggested that Israel would one day become a source of profound political division in public life on the Nordic island nation. Reading them today, it is difficult not to notice how much has changed.

The accession referendum concerns more than Iceland's European ambitions. Enlargement has never been merely an economic exercise. The Copenhagen criteria require candidate states to respect democracy, the rule of law, human rights and minority protection. These are not secondary conditions of membership, but foundations of the union itself.

Scholars have described the European Union as a "normative power," a community whose influence derives partly from its ability to shape behavior through shared legal and democratic standards. Membership entails more than adopting EU law. It also requires adherence to religious freedom, equal treatment and opposition to discrimination.

Iceland is a robust and deeply rooted democracy with strong institutions and high public trust. Judaism is officially recognized, despite the country's tiny Jewish community. Because Icelanders have had limited historical contact with Jews, the State of Israel often becomes the principal lens through which Jewish questions enter public debate.

One rare point of contact came through Dorrit Moussaieff, the Israeli-born businesswoman who served as Iceland's first lady from 2003 to 2016. Older traditions are more complicated: Iceland's celebrated Passion Hymns have been criticized for hostile depictions of Jews, illustrating how historical narratives can outlive the circumstances that produced them.

The greater challenge today lies in contemporary political discourse. Since the Hamas-led terrorist attacks in southern Israel on October 7, 2023, and the regional conflicts that followed, criticism of Israeli policies in Iceland has at times expanded into campaigns for Israel's economic and cultural isolation.

Democratic societies must remain free to debate settlements, settler violence, military operations, humanitarian policy and Palestinian statehood. The European Union itself frequently criticizes Israeli governments on these issues. The question is not whether such criticism is legitimate, but when it gives way to discriminatory exclusion.

That distinction matters because combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life are explicit EU commitments. The Union recognizes that criticism of Israel comparable to criticism directed at any other country is not antisemitic. At the same time, democratic societies should ask whether Israel is being subjected to standards not applied elsewhere, or whether opposition to a particular government is becoming an effort to isolate the world's only Jewish state as such.

Iceland's recurring boycott initiatives illustrate the dilemma.

In 2015, Reykjavík's City Council voted to boycott Israeli goods, then withdrew the resolution within days after domestic and international criticism. Other campaigns have sought to exclude Israel's public broadcaster from the Eurovision Song Contest, while calls for wider boycotts have intensified since October 2023. These initiatives are not identical. Together, however, they raise a recurring question: Is the target a particular policy, or is Israel itself being treated as unworthy of ordinary cultural, academic and economic relations?

EU membership is not merely symbolic. The Union maintains an extensive Association Agreement with Israel and broad cooperation in trade, research, innovation and higher education. Member states remain free to criticize Israeli governments and support measures adopted through established EU procedures. Blanket unilateral boycotts, however, raise thorny questions about consistency with the Union's common framework.

The implications extend beyond foreign policy. While Icelandic Jewish communities are small and largely invisible, campaigns to exclude Israel can reinforce the perception that the Jewish state occupies a uniquely illegitimate place in public life. Not every criticism of Israel is antisemitic, but neither should every campaign against Israel be presumed immune from scrutiny merely because it is framed in the language of human rights.

The August referendum does not ask Icelanders to approve EU membership, but whether to reopen the path toward it. That path requires more than adopting directives or participating in the single market. It also requires a visible commitment to combating discrimination, protecting minority life and applying standards consistently. Rejecting blanket exclusion would not restrict legitimate criticism of Israeli governments. It would reinforce the equal treatment that European integration claims to embody.

The Icelandic diplomats whose telegrams I read in the archives assumed that cooperation between Israel and Europe was self-evident. Seven decades later, Iceland's referendum asks a different question. Not whether Europe and Israel will always agree, but whether Europe still possesses the confidence to distinguish between legitimate criticism and discriminatory exclusion. That may ultimately be the real test of a union built on shared values.

ESSAY 20

From the Danube to the Negev

The Jerusalem Post Printed Edition, 12/8/2026, page 11.

From the Danube to the Negev: Climate Change is a European Problem Too – Opinion – The Jerusalem Post, 12/8/2026. https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-905201

The Danube is running so low that history is resurfacing.

Along stretches of one of Europe's great rivers, falling water levels have exposed German warships sunk during the final months of the Second World War. The images are dramatic. But what is emerging from the Danube is more than the wreckage of Europe's past. It is a warning about its future.

Across the continent, extreme heat is drying soils and vegetation and putting growing pressure on water resources. Spain, already scarred by devastating fires in recent years, is again confronting heat waves and fears of another severe wildfire season. What once appeared primarily a Mediterranean problem is becoming a European one.

In climatic terms, the Mediterranean is moving north. Conditions once associated with Europe's southern periphery are reaching deeper into the continent.

Water scarcity in Israel

For Israel, none of this is unfamiliar.

Water scarcity has shaped Israeli policy since the country's creation. Necessity drove Israel to invest in desalination, wastewater recycling, drip irrigation, efficient agricultural use, and the careful management of a resource it could never take for granted.

According to a 2025 OECD country report, Israel's five desalination plants now supply more than 80% of its domestic urban water, while more than 87% of wastewater effluent is reused, primarily for agriculture.

Israel did not develop these capabilities because environmentalism was fashionable. It developed them because there was no alternative.

That experience is becoming increasingly relevant to Europe – and could provide a new basis for cooperation between Europe and Israel.

Water scarcity is only part of the challenge. Across southern Europe, prolonged heat and drought increasingly interact with soil degradation, stressed vegetation, and wildfire risk. Here, too, decades of Israeli research into agriculture, water, and ecosystems under arid and semi-arid conditions offer a natural basis for collaboration.

The European Union itself recognizes the scale and systemic nature of the challenge. Its Water Resilience Strategy calls for greater efficiency, modernized infrastructure, reduced leakage, increased investment, and stronger international cooperation.

By linking water resilience to competitiveness, disaster preparedness, and security, the strategy signals a broader shift: climate adaptation is moving from the margins of environmental policy to the center of European economic and security planning.

It should also become a new pillar of relations between Europe and Israel.

Europe hardly lacks expertise of its own. Its strengths in river basin management, forest protection, ecosystem restoration, satellite monitoring, and civil protection complement Israel's experience with water recycling, precision irrigation, drought management, dryland agriculture, and land degradation.

Israel, which has itself relied on European assistance during major wildfires, has as much to gain from such cooperation as Europe does.

The opportunities are practical. Cooperation could range from early wildfire detection, drought forecasting, and ecological recovery to wastewater recycling, precision irrigation, leakage reduction, and technologies that allow societies to do more with increasingly scarce water supplies.

There is no need to start from scratch. Israel already participates in European research and innovation networks. The EU's Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area, PRIMA, brings together countries from both sides of the Mediterranean to develop solutions in water management, agriculture, and food systems. Horizon Europe provides another powerful framework for scientific collaboration.

The need for strategic ambition

What is missing is not the will to work together. It is strategic ambition.

The EU and Israel should turn these scattered initiatives into an EU-Israel Climate Resilience Partnership, focused initially on three areas: water security, dryland agriculture and land restoration, and wildfire prevention and response.

Such a partnership would go beyond existing research cooperation by connecting universities and research institutes with municipalities, water authorities, civil protection agencies, governments, and private companies.

It could establish joint demonstration projects in European regions particularly exposed to drought and fire, including Spain, Greece, Cyprus, and Italy.

It could provide a platform for testing Israeli technologies under European conditions and European technologies under Israeli ones, while creating permanent networks among scientists, emergency services, and policymakers.

In time, such cooperation could extend beyond Israel and the EU. Climate change is transforming the Mediterranean into an increasingly shared ecological space. Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, the UAE, and other regional partners face many of the same pressures. Water scarcity, drought, and wildfire are challenges that do not respect political borders.

There is also a broader political reason for doing this now.

Relations between Israel and Europe are going through one of their most difficult periods in decades. The war in Gaza and profound disagreements over Israeli-Palestinian issues, humanitarian access, and international law will not disappear because Europeans and Israelis work together on irrigation or wildfire prevention. Climate cooperation cannot resolve those disputes, nor should it be expected to.

But foreign policy does not require agreement on everything before joint action becomes possible on anything.

Indeed, one of the dangers facing relations between Israel and Europe today is the temptation to allow disagreement in one field to paralyze cooperation in others: science, universities, trade, culture, and technology. Climate adaptation demonstrates why that logic is shortsighted.

A wildfire in Spain does not ask how Madrid voted at the United Nations. Falling water levels in the Danube are indifferent to the state of relations between Jerusalem and Brussels.

Climate change has an unusual ability to strip international relations of their rhetoric. It forces governments to confront physical realities.

And one of those realities is geography. Europe, Israel, and their Mediterranean neighbors are increasingly confronting variations of the same problem: how to sustain prosperous societies in a region becoming hotter, drier, and more vulnerable to extreme events.

For decades, Europe possessed knowledge and institutions that Israel sought to emulate. Today, in some fields, Israel has accumulated experience that Europe can use. In others, Israel has much to learn from Europe.

That is precisely what partnership means. The wrecks emerging from the Danube belong to a Europe defined by conflict. Their reappearance should serve as a

warning of a different kind. The challenges now rising to the surface will not be solved by countries retreating from one another.

From the Danube River to the Negev Desert, climate change is redrawing the map. Europe and Israel should ensure that their relationship changes with it.

ESSAY 21

For Israelis, Europe Is No Longer a Cheap Flight Away

Jerusalem News Syndicate (JNS), 19/8/2026. https://www.jns.org/opinion/sharon-pardo/for-israelis-europe-is-no-longer-a-cheap-flight-away

Washington Jewish Week, 20/8/2026. https://www.washingtonjewishweek.com/for-israelis-europe-is-no-longer-a-cheap-flight-away/

Philadelphia Jewish Exponent, 20/8/2026. https://www.jewishexponent.com/for-israelis-europe-is-no-longer-a-cheap-flight-away/

Baltimore Jewish Times, 20/8/2026. https://www.jewishtimes.com/for-israelis-europe-is-no-longer-a-cheap-flight-away/

The Jewish Star, 2/9/2026. https://www.thejewishstar.com/stories/for-israelis-europe-no-longer-cheap-flight-away,26797

For years, a cheap airline ticket made the Jewish state feel almost European. An Israeli could fly to Warsaw for the weekend, a student in Milan could visit family in Israel, and a European Jew could travel to Tel Aviv almost as easily as to another European capital.

Budget aviation accomplished something that diplomacy and treaties never quite achieved: It made the Mediterranean Sea seem smaller and brought Israel into the everyday rhythms of European life.

Then came October 7, and the old boundaries reappeared.

A recent report on the changing economics of European aviation offers an unexpected window into this transformation. According to the report, selected economy fares on Ryanair, easyJet and Wizz Air were 39.2% higher in May than a year earlier. Compared with early 2024, average fares had more than doubled.

Fuel costs have risen sharply, while baggage, seat selection and other additional charges have become increasingly important to the business model.

For European travelers, this is primarily an economic story. The era of extraordinarily inexpensive flying may be changing. For Israelis, however, two developments are converging: Low-cost flying is becoming less low-cost, while regional instability has made air links to Europe increasingly fragile.

In the past seven decades, Israel has become deeply connected to Europe without ever becoming fully part of its institutional order. The European Union is Israel's largest trading partner. Israeli researchers participate extensively in European research programs. Israelis study at European universities, purchase homes in European cities, acquire European citizenship and travel across the continent in enormous numbers.

Budget airlines provided much of the physical infrastructure for this relationship. Ryanair, easyJet and Wizz Air turned European capitals into places Israelis could visit frequently rather than occasionally. Rome and Vienna became weekend destinations. Bucharest and Athens were less than three hours away. At times, a flight to Berlin could cost less than dinner at a Tel Aviv restaurant.

This wasn't simply tourism. It altered how Israelis imagined their place in relation to Europe.

The wars since the Hamas-led terrorist attacks in southern Israel on October 7, 2023, have exposed the fragility of that arrangement. When security conditions deteriorate, foreign airlines can leave – and quickly.

easyJet has canceled its Tel Aviv services until late October 2026, while Ryanair remains absent for a combination of commercial and operational reasons. Wizz Air offers perhaps the clearest illustration. It returned to Israel in May following an earlier suspension, only to halt its Tel Aviv operations again when Iran fired missiles at Israel in June.

Nothing is surprising about an airline protecting its passengers, crews and aircraft. These companies are making commercial and security calculations, not geopolitical statements. What matters is what their decisions reveal about Israel's relationship with Europe.

For decades, globalization encouraged Israelis to believe that physical location mattered less. Europe appeared close, inexpensive and readily available. During periods of calm, an Israeli could inhabit several worlds almost simultaneously: working in Tel Aviv, holding a Portuguese passport, collaborating with colleagues in Brussels and spending a weekend in Budapest.

Security crises reveal the limits of that experience. European citizens continue moving within one of the most integrated transportation systems ever created. Israelis looking toward the same network discover that their ability to enter it can vanish from an airline timetable within hours.

This vulnerability has another dimension that receives far less attention: Europe's Jewish communities.

Budget aviation has transformed contemporary Jewish life as well. For many European Jews, Israel is not just another foreign destination. Children study there. Relatives live there. Families travel for holidays. Friends move between Israeli and European cities. Some contemplate *Aliyah*. Others would never consider leaving their home countries, but still regard Israel as part of their emotional, communal and religious world.

Frequent and affordable flights, therefore, helped create an informal Jewish space stretching from Tel Aviv to London, Paris, Berlin, Madrid. An airline seat became one small part of the infrastructure sustaining ties across that space.

This has acquired particular importance since October 7. Jewish communities across Europe have experienced a dramatic resurgence of violent antisemitism. Against that background, Israel can assume a different psychological role for many European Jews. Here lies the paradox: At precisely the moment when some may feel a stronger bond with Israel, getting there has become less predictable.

That doesn't mean European Jews are preparing to leave. Nor should every discussion of European antisemitism end with the question of *Aliyah*. Jewish life on the continent is ancient, diverse and deeply rooted. The more interesting issue is how the ability to travel to Israel shapes the meaning of belonging in Europe.

Knowing that Israel is three hours and a modest airfare away produces a different sense of security and belonging than knowing that flights may disappear with the

next missile attack. Physical proximity and emotional attachment are different things, but they inevitably influence one another.

There is a mirror image in Israel.

Israelis have rarely been more critical of Europe politically. Disagreements over Gaza, settlements, violent settlers, the recognition of Palestine and international law have strained relations with several European governments. At the same time, Israelis continue to seek European citizenship, travel across the continent, attend football matches and purchase apartments in European cities. Europe remains deeply attractive, even when Israelis are angry with it.

The changing aviation map therefore illuminates a broader feature of Israel's relationship with the continent. Israel is deeply embedded in European economic, academic, cultural, sporting and social networks, yet it does not enjoy the institutional protections that underpin integration among EU member states.

In ordinary times, that distinction is easy to overlook. Political agreements, research programs, tourism, dual citizenship and frequent flights create an extraordinary degree of proximity. Under pressure, however, the limits become unmistakable. Airlines withdraw. Academic relationships come under strain. Cultural and sporting participation becomes politicized. Ties that once appeared routine suddenly look provisional.

The airline ticket was, therefore, never just an airline ticket. It represented a remarkable period during which Israelis and European Jews became accustomed to treating Israel and Europe as parts of a shared social space.

Now the economics of European aviation are changing as well. Fares are rising, operating costs are increasing, and carriers are reconsidering where they deploy their aircraft. For many Europeans, that may mean paying more for a weekend abroad. Israel faces an additional vulnerability: It sits at the edge of the European aviation system and risks being removed from it whenever the regional security calculus changes.

For 20 years, budget airlines taught Israelis that Europe was next door. Since October 7, they have been reminded that it is still abroad.

For Israelis and European Jews alike, what is becoming more fragile may ultimately matter far more than the price of the ticket.

ESSAY 22

Israel, Europe, and the Right to Disappear

The Jerusalem Post Printed Edition, 2/9/2026, page 10.

The Right to Disappear: What Israel Can Learn from Europe About Privacy – Opinion – The Jerusalem Post, 2/9/2026. https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-907238

Last week, I found myself walking through Vienna in the footsteps of two women whose disappearance had transfixed the Israeli public.

Mali Yahalomi and her daughter Liel disappeared during a trip to Europe. Their relatives were desperate for news. Israeli officials became involved, the embassy appealed for help, and people kept asking a seemingly obvious question: How can two women simply disappear in the middle of Vienna in 2026?

I happened to be in the city shortly afterward. By then, the two had been found. I was not searching for them. Instead, I looked at the environment they had moved through.

What struck me was the ubiquity of surveillance. At Vienna's main railway station alone, dozens of security cameras were plainly visible. Cameras were also visible in shops and public spaces. Like virtually every major European capital, Vienna is a city in which movement through transportation hubs leaves digital traces.

That made me reconsider the Israeli reaction.

Many had wondered why the Austrian Federal Police could not locate the two women more quickly. With cameras, mobile phones, digital payments and transportation records, how difficult could it be to reconstruct the movements of two people?

Walking through Vienna, however, I began to wonder whether this was the wrong question. Perhaps the more interesting issue was not what a modern state can discover but what a liberal democracy is entitled to do with information about adults who may be acting voluntarily.

Important limits remain to what can be said about this investigation, and parts of the case remain subject to legal restrictions. It would be wrong to speculate about what the Austrian police knew, when they knew it, or which tools they used. Public reporting suggests circumstances more complicated than a simple case of two people seeking privacy. The case should not be forced into a neat philosophical parable.

But the questions it raises remain.

For many Israelis, the assumption was straightforward. A mother and daughter had vanished. Their relatives were terrified.

The two had failed to return home as expected. Surely the police should find them and say where they were.

There is something recognizably Israeli in that assumption.

Israel is an intensely familial society. Parents remain involved in the lives of adult children. Children assume responsibility for aging parents. Extended families mobilize during crises. When someone disappears, this can rapidly become a family emergency, a community emergency, and sometimes a national one.

Israel's security culture reinforces that instinct. Israelis routinely accept intrusions into privacy in the name of safety that many Europeans might find uncomfortable. We open our bags at entrances, answer questions at airports, and encounter security checks in everyday life. In an emergency, we expect the state to use the tools at its disposal. When someone goes missing, our instinct is simple: find them.

European law and political culture often act from a different premise.

Privacy and data protection occupy an unusually prominent place in European law and political culture. European political systems remain deeply conscious of the dangers created when governments possess extensive information about individuals with too few restraints on how it can be used.

The distinction matters. A city can possess extensive surveillance capabilities without assuming that the resulting information belongs to relatives, the press, or the public. The ability to determine where someone is does not automatically entitle others to know.

The question becomes particularly uncomfortable when an adult disappears voluntarily.

If someone has been kidnapped, attacked, or coerced, the responsibility to intervene is clear. But what if an adult chooses to leave and does not want to be found? Does her family have a right to know where she is? Does the public? Does the press? At what point does the obligation to search end and personal autonomy begin?

Such questions can sound almost offensive in an Israeli context when frightened relatives are involved. Our instinct is that their anguish should outweigh almost every competing consideration.

If the police have information, tell them. If technology can locate someone, use it. The idea that an adult might possess something approaching a right to disappear can clash with a culture built around unusually strong bonds of family and collective responsibility.

Yet on one crucial point, I think the European instinct is correct.

An adult who is competent, safe, and acting freely does not lose her privacy because those who love her desperately want information. Even the strongest bonds do not give us an unconditional claim to another adult's whereabouts or reasons for leaving. In this sense, the right to disappear is not the right to obstruct a lawful investigation; it is the right to go against the notion of automatic disclosure.

But privacy should not require cruelty.

Once police establish that a missing adult is alive, safe, and acting voluntarily, there is a strong case for telling loved ones precisely that, so long as doing so creates no further safety risk. Police need not reveal the person's location or other information she wishes to keep private. The family deserves reassurance, not necessarily disclosure.

That distinction offers a way to reconcile two values that need not be absolute rivals: the understandable need to know that someone we love is safe and the individual's claim to autonomy.

None of this means that Europeans care less about family or that Israelis care nothing about privacy. The difference emerges when legitimate values collide.

Israelis' collective responsibility

Israel gives exceptional weight to family solidarity and collective responsibility, reinforced by a security culture in which protecting life can justify intrusions into personal autonomy. European institutions and political culture often give greater formal weight to privacy, individual choice, and restraints on state power.

This is what stayed with me as I walked through Vienna. Israelis had looked at the disappearance primarily as a practical problem: Where are they, and why have the police not found them? I began to see a harder question beneath it: How much are we entitled to know about an adult who does not want to be found?

Israelis and Europeans frequently speak of their shared democratic values. But sharing values does not mean ranking them in the same order. Both value security, privacy, family, freedom, and human dignity. Their differences emerge most clearly when those values collide.

Here, I believe the balance should be clear. The state should establish that a missing adult is safe. The family deserves to know that much.

After that, the right to disappear may indeed be a right.

ESSAY 23

Pedro Sánchez is Not Spain, and Benjamin Netanyahu is Not Israel

Jerusalem News Syndicate (JNS), 9/9/2026. https://www.jns.org/opinion/sharon-pardo/pedro-sanchez-is-not-spain-and-benjamin-netanyahu-is-not-israel

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez is not Spain. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is not Israel.

This should be obvious. Increasingly, however, the distinction is disappearing from the language of Israel's relations with Europe.

That matters because disagreements between governments are becoming confrontations between countries, criticism of policies is interpreted as hostility toward states and political leaders are made to stand for entire societies.

Sánchez provided a striking example in recent days. He accused networks linked to Russia and Israel of spreading and amplifying disinformation about the migration crisis in Ceuta – where more than 70,000 people crossed from Morocco in late July – citing research by the European External Action Service, the European Union's foreign service.

The allegation is serious. If the Spanish government or the European External Action Service possesses evidence that Israeli-linked networks participated in an operation intended to destabilize Spain, it should make that evidence public. Israel is entitled to demand it.

But there is a broader problem: A claim concerning networks linked to particular actors can easily become a claim about Israel.

Countries are powerful political categories. Governments are temporary. Policies are complicated. Saying that another government opposes a particular policy invites an argument about that policy. Saying that another country is acting against yours creates something much larger: a national confrontation.

The Israeli government recently used the same rhetorical mechanism, although in very different circumstances.

The British government just enacted a ban on settlement products in response to settler violence in Judea and Samaria and Israel's E1 settlement project. Regarding the latter, the government openly opposes a declared policy of the Israeli government, which it believes threatens the possibility of a two-state solution.

Israel can challenge the legal, political, and strategic case for British measures and respond to them. But the dispute concerns a specific Israeli government policy.

Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar described it differently. "If Britain acts against the State of Israel, the State of Israel will act against Britain," he told *Ynet*, warning that Israel possesses unspecified "tools" with which to respond.

The cases are somewhat different. Sánchez has made a factual allegation about covert activity and therefore must produce evidence of it. The British government is making a political judgment about an acknowledged Israeli policy, whose merits and consequences can be contested without first establishing that the policy exists.

This is not an argument for false equivalence. Governments should be judged on what they say and do. Some accusations are more serious than others. Precision means preserving those differences, not erasing them in the name of balance.

What connects the episodes is the expansion of the identity of the actors: Governments become countries. Policies become national positions. Limited disputes become confrontations between states.

Whether this is deliberate or instinctive matters less than what the language does. It can mobilize solidarity, simplify complicated arguments and make retaliation easier to justify.

"Britain is acting against Israel" carries a force that "the British government is considering measures against one policy of the Israeli government" does not. What works politically in the short term can damage national interests in the long term.

Israelis rightly object when European leaders speak as though Netanyahu represents every Israeli or the policies of his coalition reveal something fundamental about Israeli society. Millions of Israelis disagree with their government on settlements, the war in Gaza, the judiciary and almost every other contested issue.

The same distinction should be made regarding European societies.

Sánchez is not Spain. The British government is not British society. Even the institutions of the European Union cannot encompass the political diversity of more than 450 million Europeans.

Israel cannot demand that European leaders distinguish between Israel and its government while treating every hostile statement by a European leader as evidence that "Europe" has turned against Israel.

European governments and leaders have an equivalent responsibility. Opposition to Netanyahu cannot become opposition to Israel. Criticism of Israeli policies cannot become collective suspicion of Israelis, and certainly not of European Jews.

The relationship between Israel and Europe is also much bigger than the governments currently arguing over it.

The European Union remains Israel's largest trading partner. Israeli and European scientists conduct research together. Companies invest across the Mediterranean. Israelis travel, study and live in Europe. Many Israelis hold European citizenship or are eligible for it. Jewish communities connect the two spaces through families, institutions, history and identity.

These relationships should not become collateral damage whenever political relations deteriorate.

This is where the interests of politicians and states can diverge. A leader may benefit from portraying a dispute as a national confrontation. The state that leader temporarily represents has an interest in ensuring that the confrontation remains limited. Israel will still need scientific cooperation, trade and political relationships with Europe after the present coalition is gone. Spain and Britain

will still have economic, strategic and societal interests involving Israel after their current governments have left office.

That means insulating as much of the relationship as possible.

Scientific cooperation should not automatically suffer because of a dispute over settlements. Trade should not become a proxy battlefield for every disagreement over Gaza. Cultural and academic relations should not rise and fall with every diplomatic confrontation. European disagreements with an Israeli government should never be transferred onto Israelis or Jewish communities.

The same discipline is required from Israel. A sharply critical government in Madrid does not make Spain an enemy. A confrontation with London does not require a confrontation with British society. A disagreement in Brussels does not mean that Israel has "lost Europe."

This is not diplomatic politeness. It is strategic insulation.

Governments change. Sánchez will not govern Spain forever. Netanyahu will not govern Israel forever. Foreign ministers will leave office, coalitions will collapse, and elections will produce governments whose policies cannot yet be predicted.

Geography will not change. Israel will remain on Europe's Mediterranean doorstep. Europe will remain one of Israel's most important economic and scientific partners. Both will continue confronting many of the same challenges.

The danger is not disagreement. Democracies disagree, sometimes profoundly. The danger begins when a dispute with a government becomes a confrontation with a country, and everything else is dragged into it.

Pedro Sánchez is not Spain. Benjamin Netanyahu is not Israel. Governments are temporary. Countries have to live with what their governments leave behind.

ESSAY 24

After FZ1073, Europe Spoke in Different Voices

The Times of Israel, 1/10/2026. *https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/after-fz1073-europe-spoke-in-different-voices/*

The passengers, the captain, and the cabin crew of Flydubai flight FZ1073 are heroes. When catastrophe threatened, they acted. They fought back, helped regain control of the aircraft, and saved lives. What happened afterward was less straightforward.

European capitals struggled to find a common language.

There is still much we do not know about why the attack occurred. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has opened an investigation, including into whether it was connected to terrorist activity or planned in advance. Flydubai has rightly warned against premature speculation.

That uncertainty explains caution about the word "terrorism." What followed, however, showed how politically charged even the vocabulary surrounding violence against Israelis has become.

Serbia's foreign minister, Marko Đurić, went furthest. He condemned an "attempted terror attack," expressed solidarity with Israel and the UAE, and linked the event to the vision of the Abraham Accords.

Germany responded firmly without prejudging the investigation. Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul condemned a grave attack on civil aviation. The European External Action Service (EEAS) likewise spoke explicitly of an "attack," expressed sympathy with the passengers and crew, and welcomed their safe landing.

Britain chose a different language. Foreign Secretary Ed Miliband said he was "deeply concerned about the incident" and relieved that the aircraft had landed safely, while referring later in the same statement to those injured "in the attack." His choice of "incident" nevertheless drew criticism in Britain and Israel.

France was similarly cautious. Foreign Minister Jean Noël Barrot said that a tragedy had been narrowly avoided, praised the courage and composure of the pilot and passengers, and called for the investigation to establish the circumstances and the attacker's motivations.

The differences matter. Belgrade spoke of terrorism. Berlin spoke of an attack on civil aviation. Brussels called it an attack. London and Paris preferred more restrained formulations. Yet all expressed the essential human response: relief that catastrophe had been prevented and sympathy for those aboard.

No investigation was necessary to establish that 174 passengers had narrowly escaped disaster, or that the Indian captain, Smit Machchhar, had been stabbed while helping to save them.

But the words quickly acquired almost as much weight as that shared reality. In Israel, some focused on Miliband's word "incident" more than on the concern he expressed and on the fact that the same statement called it an "attack."

That reaction points to a wider pattern. European governments must keep separating concern for Israelis from support for Israeli policy. Israelis, for their part, should recognize that diplomatic restraint while the facts remain uncertain does not necessarily signify indifference to Israeli lives.

European leaders can oppose Israeli policies in Gaza and the West Bank while recognizing Israeli suffering. They can insist upon Palestinian freedom and dignity while condemning Hamas. Israelis can disagree sharply with European governments without treating every carefully chosen formulation as evidence of hostility or antisemitism.

FZ1073 also represented something larger. A commercial route between Dubai and Tel Aviv is an everyday expression of the normalization created by the Abraham Accords. The aircraft diverted to Saudi Arabia, a country that does not maintain diplomatic relations with Israel, and the passengers continued on to Israel aboard a replacement Flydubai plane. Flydubai has since suspended flights to and from Israel. An artery of normalization has been interrupted.

Three years after October 7, relations between Israel and many European countries are deeply strained. Each side increasingly reads the other through suspicion and grievance.

The danger is not disagreement. Democracies disagree. Allies disagree, sometimes bitterly. The danger begins when disagreement becomes so consuming that even expressions of basic human concern are immediately dissected for their political meaning.

The passengers and crew of FZ1073 did not need European governments to determine why their aircraft was attacked. Investigators will do that. They simply needed others to recognize what had happened to them.

Europe found the words. The problem is that between Israel and Europe, the words themselves have become the battleground.

ESSAY 25

A New EU Status for Canada? Israel Has Lived the Model for Decades

The Jerusalem Post, 23/9/2026. https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-909405
A New EU Status for Canada? – The Jerusalem Post Printed Edition, 24/9/2026, page 10.

Ursula von der Leyen made a striking proposal in Strasbourg on September 16. With Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney in attendance, the European Commission president opened the door to Canada becoming what she called the European Union's first "associate member."

There is only one problem. The European Union has no such status.

Associate membership does not appear in the EU treaties. There is no established package of rights and obligations attached to it, no predetermined place for an associate member in the Union's institutions, and no agreement about how much access to the Single Market it would entail. Von der Leyen supplied a name before Europe had designed the institution.

But Brussels does not need to start with a blank sheet of paper.

It should look at Israel.

Canada may indeed become the first country formally granted whatever new status the EU eventually calls "associate membership." But it would hardly be the first country to inhabit the space between membership and an ordinary third-country relationship. Israel has spent nearly seven decades constructing one version of such a relationship: integration without membership.

The story began almost as soon as the European project itself. In April 1958, only months after the Treaty of Rome entered into force, Israel became the third country, after Greece and the United States, to request the establishment of a diplomatic mission to the European Economic Community in Brussels. Full diplomatic relations followed in February 1959.

And Israel wanted more than trade.

From the beginning, Israeli policymakers sought association with the emerging Community. The Israeli ambition was substantially political as well as economic. Israel eventually accepted agreements that fell short of association, but the larger objective was to secure a recognized place alongside the developing European project.

What Israel was asking Europe in the late 1950s sounds surprisingly familiar in 2026: how close can a non-member country come to the European project without actually joining it?

The answer emerged gradually rather than through grand constitutional design.

Over the decades, Israel and Europe built their ties layer by layer. The 1995 EU-Israel Association Agreement, which entered into force in 2000, established the central institutional framework. The European Neighbourhood Policy later added an Action Plan intended to bring Israel closer to European policies and programs. Cooperation expanded into research and innovation, aviation, pharmaceuticals, education and regulatory cooperation.

Israel's largest trading partner

Today those ties reach remarkably far. The EU is Israel's largest trading partner, accounting for 31.7% of Israel's trade in goods in 2025, worth €43.3 billion. Israel

participates in Horizon Europe. The EU-Israel aviation agreement connects the Israeli and European aviation markets, while another agreement facilitates trade in pharmaceuticals. Israel also participates in the Pan-Euro-Mediterranean system of rules of origin.

This is not EU membership. But neither is it a conventional relationship between two separate markets.

Nearly two decades ago, Joel Peters and I described the logic behind this arrangement as "integration without membership." We proposed a Euro-Israeli Partnership that would sit deliberately below full membership while moving beyond the existing Association Agreement. It envisaged deeper political cooperation, Israeli participation in European agencies and programs, gradual convergence with relevant parts of the European acquis, and greater access to the Single Market.

The objective was not to prepare Israel for eventual accession. It was to recognize that European integration need not end at the Union's formal borders.

Israel is not the only precedent. Switzerland offers the EU's most developed example of sector-by-sector integration outside membership, with extensive agreements connecting it to large parts of the Single Market and numerous European programs. But Switzerland is geographically and economically embedded in Europe. Israel offers a different lesson: a country outside geographical Europe, with no realistic membership perspective, can nevertheless become deeply connected to selected parts of the European system.

That distinction suddenly matters far beyond Israel.

Carney has ruled out Canadian EU membership. What Ottawa is seeking instead is what he has called a "unique alliance," extending across trade, defense, technology, energy, and critical minerals. Canada has already moved closer to European defense structures through its participation in the EU's SAFE defense program.

Here the analogy with Israel has limits. Israel's integration has developed overwhelmingly through economic, regulatory, scientific, and sectoral cooperation. It does not provide a blueprint for the defense and security dimension that Canada and the EU are now considering. If associate membership eventually

encompasses defense procurement and strategic coordination, Brussels will be constructing something new.

But the Israeli experience does offer a model for how such a relationship can be constructed.

Closer ties do not have to be all or nothing. They can proceed sector by sector. Research systems can connect without political membership. Aviation markets can open. Regulations can converge in selected areas. European programs can admit non-member states. New areas of cooperation can be added as political circumstances and mutual interests change. None of that necessarily requires the full institutional rights of an EU member state.

The Israeli case also cautions against romanticizing such arrangements. EU-Israel relations are currently experiencing a period of severe political strain. EU institutions have debated Israel's compliance with the human-rights provisions of the Association Agreement and possible restrictions on parts of the relationship over the war in Gaza.

That does not invalidate the model. It demonstrates something important about it. Deep institutional ties do not eliminate political disagreement. They create structures within which cooperation, conditionality, and conflict can coexist.

Canada has, therefore, exposed a gap in the EU's institutional architecture. There are countries that may want much more than a trade agreement without seeking membership. Switzerland demonstrates how far that principle can extend within Europe. Israel demonstrates that it can extend beyond it. Canada may now add a strategic and defense dimension neither model fully provides.

Canada could still become the first country formally designated an EU associate member. But it would enter territory Europe has been exploring for decades.

The Canadian question is how a country can move much closer to the EU without becoming a member of it.

The name may be new. Much of the model is not.

ESSAY 26

In Europe's Gaze, October 7 Risks Becoming a Footnote

The Jerusalem Post, 7/10/2026, https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-910773
The Staring Face of Europe – The Jerusalem Post Printed Edition, 7/10/2026, page 9.

With the third anniversary of October 7, the events of that day are acquiring another layer of meaning. October 7 can become compressed into a date, and the date into a chronological marker: what happened immediately before Gaza.

But for Israelis, October 7 is not merely what came before Gaza, just as Gaza cannot be reduced to what came after October 7.

I found myself thinking about this in an unexpected place: a bookstore in Braga, Portugal.

Fernando Pessoa once imagined Europe as a human body. In "The Field of the Castles," Portugal's great modern poet describes the continent reclining on its elbows. One elbow is Italy. The other is England. Europe looks outward through Greek eyes. But the face doing the looking is Portugal.

"Enigmatic and fateful she stares," Pessoa writes in Richard Zenith's translation, "Out West, to the future of the past."

Then comes the final line: "The staring face is Portugal."

In that Portuguese bookstore, I wondered what Europe's staring face now sees when it looks toward Israel.

Before me was a table of books about Israel, the Palestinians, and Gaza, most in Portuguese translation. Each could be judged on its own merits. Together, however, they told a story.

October 7 and the Israel-Hamas war from a Portuguese bookshop

There was Omer Bartov asking what had gone wrong with his country, Ilan Pappé's *Israel vs Palestina* (*A Very Short History of the Israel–Palestine Conflict*), Raja Shehadeh's *What Does Israel Fear from Palestine?*, and Enzo Traverso's *Gaza Faces History*.

Alexandra Lucas Coelho's *Gaza Está em Toda a Parte* ("*Gaza Is Everywhere*") stood there in Portuguese, alongside Joe Sacco's *War on Gaza* and Michael Scott-Baumann's general history Palestinians and Israelis.

There is nothing illegitimate about these books. Palestinian accounts belong on European bookshelves. So does criticism of Israel.

What interested me was the collection. A reader encountered Israel mainly through conflict, accusation, and catastrophe. Palestinian perspectives were abundant. The two authors born in Israel, Bartov and Pappé, were deeply critical of their country. Gaza dominated the visual landscape.

What was harder to see was October 7 as an event in its own right.

Where were the communities of southern Israel, the Nova music festival, the hostages, and their families? Where was Hamas? Where was the vulnerability October 7 implanted in Israeli political consciousness?

The point is not that every bookstore must achieve ideological balance. Nor is one table in Braga a verdict on Europe. But an arrangement shapes what a passerby sees first. Accumulation creates meaning. When books selected for attention point predominantly in one direction, curation becomes part of the argument.

Then, close to the center of the table, my eyes stopped on one word.

Holocaustos.

The book was Gilles Kepel's *Holocausts: Israel, Gaza and the War Against the West*. Kepel is not simply equating Gaza with the Nazi Holocaust. His argument encompasses both the Hamas massacres of October 7 and the war in Gaza that followed.

October 7 was not wholly absent. Kepel's book treats it, but under a word that reframed it before the reader met it as an event in its own right.

To the left was Bartov's book. The American edition, published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, is titled *Israel: What Went Wrong?* Its front cover contains no reference to the Holocaust. The Portuguese edition by Ideias de Ler asks instead, *O que correu mal com o meu país?* ("What Went Wrong with My Country?"), with a subtitle: "*Entre a memória do Holocausto e a violência do presente*" ("Between the memory of the Holocaust and the violence of the present").

Bartov is a historian of the Holocaust, and Holocaust memory is central to his analysis of Israel, so the subtitle reflects the book. But the Portuguese edition carries the Holocaust on its front cover, where the American edition does not.

The Holocaust, therefore, surfaced twice on this table, in different books and for different reasons. Nothing placed an equal sign between Gaza and Auschwitz. Kepel and Bartov are not making the same argument.

But cultural associations rarely need an equal sign. Few words in Europe carry greater weight than Holocaust.

For decades, the Holocaust occupied a distinctive place in Europe's relationship with Israel. Zionism preceded Auschwitz by decades. Yet the murder of six million Jews on European soil inevitably shaped that postwar relationship.

The Holocaust also became part of the vocabulary through which Europe came to understand itself. Never Again acquired a universal meaning, expressing an obligation to resist persecution, crimes against humanity, and genocide.

There is something essential in that universalization. Jewish historical memory cannot demand indifference to Palestinian suffering. October 7 cannot provide Israel with immunity from moral judgment, political criticism, or international law.

But universal lessons depend on preserving the particular.

If October 7 survives chiefly as the beginning of what came afterward, something has been lost. Its victims become characters in another narrative. The same is true in reverse. Palestinian deaths and destruction in Gaza cannot be treated merely as an appendix to October 7.

The challenge is to hold both without allowing either to subsume the other.

There is a profound difference between allowing the Holocaust to sharpen our sensitivity to human anguish and making it the template through which the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is understood. The first draws a universal moral responsibility from the past. The second risks merging radically different histories.

Pessoa's phrase, "the future of the past," suddenly seemed less strange.

Europe's catastrophes do not remain safely behind it. They travel forward and shape how Europeans understand wars generations later. Sometimes this produces empathy and insight. Sometimes it obscures as much as it reveals.

Israel occupies an unusual place within this inheritance. It is a Middle Eastern country deeply entangled with Europe. Europe looks at Israel and sees another state, but also Jews, Auschwitz, nationalism, colonialism, human rights, and its own unresolved arguments about power and responsibility.

The small table in Braga captured that entanglement.

As the third anniversary of October 7 approaches, the question is not which tragedy Europe should recognize. Acknowledging October 7 cannot mean blindness to Gaza. Confronting Gaza cannot make October 7 a footnote. And the Holocaust cannot make every contemporary catastrophe an echo of Auschwitz.

These histories touch one another. They do not become the same story.

Pessoa imagined Portugal as Europe's face, staring enigmatically toward "the future of the past." Europe still carries its past in its gaze. When it looks at Israel through its darkest chapter, it must take care that what came before illuminates what it sees rather than rearranges what it remembers.

The staring face is still Portugal.



PART II

The Jewish World and Europe

ESSAY 27

What Greenland Reveals about European Antisemitism

The Jerusalem Post, 14/1/2026. https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-883192

When President Donald Trump asserts that the US "needs" Greenland, commentators scramble to decode his geopolitical calculus. They analyze the variables: rare earth minerals, Arctic shipping lanes, competition with Russia and China, and the role of climate change in redrawing the polar map.

Yet there is another aspect of Greenland worth noting, one unrelated to strategic value – it has virtually no antisemitism. This places the island in remarkable isolation. Greenland stands as perhaps the only place in the European sphere with essentially no history of anti-Jewish sentiment.

History of Jews in Greenland

This is not the product of enlightened multicultural planning. Rather, it reflects the near-total absence of a Jewish community. Throughout history, Jews appeared in Greenland as visitors or temporary residents. Historians mention Jewish sailors and whalers aboard Dutch ships in the 16th and 17th centuries.

During the Second World War and the 1950s, Jewish American military personnel stationed at Thule Air Base (now known as Pituffik Space Base) held Shabbat and holiday prayer services. Later, Jewish journalists, meteorologists, nurses, and others arrived for short stays. None of this resulted in the establishment of synagogues, schools, or permanent communal institutions. Contemporary reports mention a single Jewish resident in Narsaq, who lights Chanukah candles with family abroad via Zoom.

Antisemitism doesn't exist in Greenland largely because it has no visible targets – no synagogues to vandalize, no kosher shops to boycott, no ready stereotypes to deploy. This stands in stark contrast to the continent Greenland formally belongs to.

Surge of antisemitism in Europe

Since the October 7 Hamas attack and the subsequent war in Gaza, antisemitism has surged across Europe. Synagogues have been shot at, Jewish schools require armed guards, streets carry their own threats, and political discourse frequently treats Jewish anxiety as overreaction rather than a legitimate response.

Herein lies the lesson. The problem is not that Europe has Jewish citizens, but that it fails to protect them as equals. Antisemitism does not stem from Jewish presence: It springs from conditions that leave Jews vulnerable and undefended. The historical pattern is unmistakable. When legal and political institutions guaranteed equality and security, Jewish communities thrived; when those institutions wavered or turned away, antisemitism took root.

One need not witness mobs with torches to grasp this dynamic. Official silence, institutional hesitation, and the treatment of Jews as probationary citizens are ample proof. The absence of antisemitism in Greenland is not a badge of honor: It is a non-test. Greenlandic society has never been forced to choose between protection and hostility, equality and exclusion. Europe has faced this choice repeatedly: How it responds gauges its moral seriousness.

The treatment of Jews is not a measure of grace, but one of integrity. When they are equal in law, safe in public, and entitled to ordinary civic life, society as a whole benefits. When they are exposed or silenced, citizenship itself becomes conditional.

Trump's interest in Greenland is rooted in geopolitical strategy and economics, not human rights. Yet Greenland's freedom from antisemitism holds up a mirror to Europe. The point is not to justify American territorial ambitions, but to ask an uncomfortable question: what has become of Europe's values, and is it still willing to unreservedly defend all its citizens?

ESSAY 28

In Europe: The Geography of Jewish Fear

Jewish News Syndicate (JNS), 6/2/2026. https://www.jns.org/in-europe-the-geography-of-jewish-fear/
Israel Today, 8/2/2026. https://www.israeltoday.co.il/read/in-europe-the-geography-of-jewish-fear/

Since the Hamas-led terrorist attacks in southern Israel on October 7, 2023, the geography of Jewish fear in Europe has shifted in uncomfortable ways.

Across Western Europe, loud and sometimes violent antisemitism has surged. Synagogues require heavy security; Jewish schools operate under constant protection; and many Jews report avoiding public displays of identity. In France, Germany, Belgium and the United Kingdom, attacks, threats and intimidation have become part of everyday reality. The sense of vulnerability is no longer marginal. It is widespread and deeply felt.

At the same time, Jews in Eastern and Central Europe often describe a different experience. In countries such as Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, Jewish communities report lower levels of violent antisemitism and a stronger sense of personal safety. People attend synagogue services and events without police cordons. Jewish symbols are not concealed in public. The contrast with Western Europe is difficult to ignore.

Of course, this does not mean that Eastern and Central Europe are more open, liberal or tolerant societies. It means something narrower and more concrete: Jews there are less likely to face physical violence or aggressive street-level harassment. After October 7, in Western European capitals, mass pro-Palestinian demonstrations often crossed the line from political protest to antisemitic intimidation. The absence of such scenes in much of Eastern and Central Europe translated into a simple but powerful feeling of security for Jews.

Several factors explain this divide. Governments in Eastern and Central Europe exert far tighter control over public order. Protests are limited, and policing is robust. Extremist movements, whether Islamist or far left, are marginal or closely

monitored. Antisemitism exists, but it is more likely to appear as passive prejudice than as organized or violent action. For many Jews, especially after watching events unfold in London, Brussels or Paris, this difference matters more than abstract debates about political systems.

Western Europe, by contrast, is experiencing a collision between open societies and imported conflicts. Large-scale immigration and often the radicalization that comes with it have combined to create environments where anti-Jewish and anti-Israel violence can flourish, even as governments formally condemn it. The result is a growing gap between declared values and lived reality. Jewish communities in Western Europe hear strong words of solidarity yet face real peril on the street.

This raises an uncomfortable question. If Jews live safer in Eastern and Central Europe, can we still say they live better in the liberal democracies of Western Europe?

The traditional answer has been yes. Liberal Western Europe offers stronger institutions, more cultural openness and broader civil rights. Jewish life there has long been richer, more visible and more integrated into the public sphere. But safety is not a secondary concern; it is a precondition for everything else. A liberal society that offers freedom but cannot protect minorities from violence forces a choice between ideals and survival.

This is not an argument for illiberal democracy. It is a warning to European liberal democracies. If Western Europe cannot translate its normative values into real protection for Jews, the moral high ground will continue to erode beneath their feet. Feeling safe may not be the same as living better, but without safety, the promise of the “good life” becomes theoretical.

ESSAY 29

Shelf by Shelf, Europe Is Forgetting the Jewish World

Jewish News Syndicate (JNS), 24/3/2026. https://www.jns.org/opinion/shelf-by-shelf-europe-is-forgetting-the-jewish-world

European Jewish Press, 26/3/2026. https://ejpress.org/shelf-by-shelf-europe-is-forgetting-the-jewish-world/

In a large bookstore in an Eastern European capital recently, I walked through the history section expecting to find shelves devoted to Jewish history and the Holocaust. Instead, the shelves held many books on Gaza and Palestinian history, reflecting today's intense global interest in the Middle East. Yet something quieter stood out: Despite Eastern Europe's deep Jewish past, there was almost nothing about the Jewish world.

Bookstores are the quiet architects of cultural memory. Aside from just sales, they also shape how societies remember themselves. Along the shelves, readers encounter interpretations of the past. Every section reflects choices about which voices are amplified and which are marginalized. In this sense, bookstores do far more than distribute knowledge; they help determine which narratives enter the public imagination.

Scholars have long understood this influence. In *The Bookshop: A History of the American Bookstore* (2024), Evan Friss traces the evolution of independent bookstores from the era of statesman, scientist and philosopher Benjamin Franklin to the present, showing that they have rarely been neutral marketplaces. They have served as civic spaces where booksellers deliberately shaped what their communities would read and debate. From the struggle over abolition in the 19th century to modern discussions surrounding Black Lives Matter, bookstores gave emerging ideas an audience.

A shelf is never just a shelf. When a bookseller highlights one work, places it beside others or decides not to stock it at all, the store quietly steers the intellectual journey of its visitors.

History books hold a particularly charged place in this process. They carry accounts of conflict, resilience and transformation across generations. Still, every history book reflects choices: what events deserve emphasis, whose suffering is acknowledged, which voices carry authority. Once these books reach a bookstore, they enter a larger conversation about how societies interpret the past. Readers browsing a history section are not simply exposed to facts. They encounter competing versions of memory.

Physical bookstores add something the digital space rarely replicates: discovery. Online platforms guide readers toward what they already expect. Bookstores invite surprise. Someone searching for one title may stumble upon another that reshapes an entire subject. That accidental encounter can expand curiosity and ignite new debates. For this reason, the decisions made by booksellers carry genuine cultural weight.

The recent visit to the bookstore in Eastern Europe illustrated this dynamic with unusual clarity. The country carries a heavy historical burden. During the Second World War, a large portion of its Jewish population was annihilated. Today, the country counts among Israel's closest allies in Europe. One might therefore expect its bookstores to present a broad and visible collection of works on Jewish history, the Holocaust and the centuries-long presence of Jewish communities across the region.

Walking through the history section revealed something startling. Shelf after shelf displayed books devoted to Palestinian history and the story of Gaza. Titles included *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine* by Rashid Khalidi, *Gaza: A History* by Jean-Pierre Filiu, *A Short History of the Gaza Strip* by Anne Irfan and *Muslim Europe* by Tharik Hussain.

These books represent legitimate scholarly perspectives and deserve their place in public discourse. Their presence is not the problem. Since the Hamas-led terrorist attacks in southern Israel on October 7, 2023, the wars in Gaza and Iran have commanded raw global attention, and readers naturally seek works that make sense of what they are watching unfold. Publishers respond to that demand, and bookstores respond to publishers. The market follows the conversation. There is nothing sinister in any of it.

What struck me was something else entirely. Among hundreds of titles in the history section, only a single book addressed the Holocaust directly. That book was *The Holocaust Codes* by Christian Jennings, an examination of the intelligence struggle in which British codebreakers at Bletchley Park decrypted secret SS and Gestapo communications, exposing the scale of the mass killings unfolding across Europe.

One book. On the continent where it happened.

Certainly, Palestine and the Holocaust are entirely separate subjects. Neither owes the other anything, and the flourishing of Palestinian scholarship bears no responsibility for the absence of the other. Each demands and deserves engagement on its own terms. But what that bookstore revealed is not a local failure but a specific phenomenon.

Across Europe, the volume of books examining Palestinian history and politics has grown rapidly, driven by genuine scholarly output and surging public demand. That growth is legitimate and welcome. But when it occurs without any comparable presence of works on Jewish history, the Holocaust, and the long arc of Jewish life and persecution across Europe and the Middle East, something essential vanishes from the cultural landscape. The past is increasingly read through a narrowing lens.

Historians sometimes speak of a hierarchy of victims – an implicit ranking by which certain forms of suffering receive sustained attention while others gradually recede from public awareness. Bookstores do not manufacture that hierarchy alone, but they reflect and reinforce it. Every display table, every purchasing decision, every thematic section contributes to a broader signal about whose stories remain visible and whose are permitted to fade away.

Wars of memory are not fought on battlefields. They are waged through scholarship, storytelling and the institutions that carry these stories to readers. Among those institutions, bookstores occupy a quiet but consequential position. The arrangement of their shelves may seem mundane. It is not.

When a tragedy as vast as the Holocaust fades from prominent view on the very continent where it occurred, the loss is not a publishing oversight. It is a deeper erosion of the landscape of memory. And in that quiet contest over historical awareness, the Jewish world appears to be losing ground.

ESSAY 30

The Europe Behind Lisbon's Two Doors

The Times of Israel, 27/9/2026. https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/the-europe-behind-lisbons-two-doors/

The year 2026 marks the 40th anniversary of Portugal's membership in the European Union (EU). The country joined what was then the European Communities (EC) on January 1, 1986, consolidating its transition from dictatorship to democracy. Four decades later, Portugal is celebrating a transformation that brought economic development, political stability, and a new sense of European belonging.

But European integration did not begin European history anew. It inherited it.

That thought accompanied me recently in Lisbon, where two cultural landmarks, a bookshop and a museum, led me to two men whose lives illuminate different aspects of the continent's relationship with the Jewish people.

Their stories reveal something about the Europe that preceded Portugal's accession, and the responsibilities its democratic institutions inherited.

The bookseller and the Jewish art dealer

The first is Karl Buchholz, a German bookseller and art dealer who established his business in Berlin during the 1920s. His gallery became associated with European modernism, and among his collaborators was Curt Valentin, a German Jewish art dealer who had previously worked for Alfred Flechtheim, a prominent Jewish champion of modern art driven out of Germany by Nazi persecution.

In 1937, as Valentin's future in Germany became untenable, he emigrated to New York, where he established the Buchholz Gallery. His ties with Buchholz continued across the Atlantic.

But Buchholz's wartime record was more troubling. In 1938, he became one of four dealers authorized by the Nazi regime to sell modern artworks confiscated from German public museums as degenerate art.

One painting illustrates this. Paul Klee's "Around the Fish," painted in 1926, belonged to Dresden's Gemäldegalerie until the Nazis confiscated it in 1937. In 1939, it was consigned to Buchholz in Berlin, passed through Valentin's New York gallery, and was acquired by the Museum of Modern Art that April.

The painting had been removed from a public museum, not confiscated from a Jewish private collector. But its journey demonstrates how Nazi cultural persecution became entangled with the international art market.

The assistance Buchholz provided Valentin and the dealings they subsequently conducted were intertwined. The New York gallery, which carried Buchholz's name, also became a major outlet for artworks confiscated by the Nazi regime. What enabled a Jewish dealer to rebuild his career abroad was simultaneously sustained by a trade made possible by Nazi cultural policies.

In 1943, following restrictions on his work in Germany, Buchholz opened a bookshop in Lisbon. Today, on Rua Duque de Palmela, its three floors retain the character of a literary refuge, with wooden panelling, a spiral staircase, and shelves devoted to literature, philosophy, and history. Its inviting surroundings offer little indication of the questions raised by its founder's past. The name above the entrance carries a story larger than the books inside.

The collector and the Jewish family

The second landmark is the Medeiros e Almeida Museum, housed in the former Lisbon residence of António de Medeiros e Almeida, a Portuguese businessman who assembled an extraordinary collection of European and Asian decorative arts.

The house preserves the atmosphere of a wealthy private home. Its furnished rooms, porcelain, paintings, and remarkable clocks invite visitors to admire the tastes and achievements of their former owner. Among the objects on display is a desk he used while managing the Bensaúde group. Its significance extends beyond craftsmanship into another part of his biography.

Medeiros e Almeida maintained close ties with the Bensaúde family, leading Jewish entrepreneurs originating from the Azores.

In 1941, amid fears of a possible German invasion of Portugal, Vasco Elias Bensaúde entrusted him with the management of the family's companies, transferring part of his ownership stake to him. Bensaúde subsequently sought refuge in the Azores and then the United States.

After the war, Medeiros e Almeida returned the transferred stake to the family, although he continued managing the companies for many years. Theirs was an enduring commercial partnership, not merely a favor in a crisis.

At a time when Jewish property across Europe was being seized, a Jewish businessman entrusted part of his family's economic future to a friend who was not Jewish. That trust was honored.

Medeiros e Almeida was also a member of Portugal's economic elite who sympathized with the authoritarian Estado Novo. His friendship with Bensaúde, therefore, cannot be read as evidence of democratic conviction. It was a personal commitment that deserves recognition on its own terms.

Neither story is simple. Buchholz's career and Medeiros e Almeida's conduct arose from different circumstances, but together they reveal how much of the Jewish experience remains embedded in places not ordinarily associated with Jewish memory.

The Europe we choose to remember

For Israelis, at a time when relations with European governments are strained, it is tempting to read the continent through the experience of Jewish persecution. That history remains indispensable. But it is not the entirety of the Jewish experience in Europe. Nor should remembering those who offered protection become an excuse for overlooking those who profited from persecution. Holding both together makes our understanding of Europe more complete.

Recognition need not begin with grand declarations. The Buchholz bookshop could explain its founder's role in the Nazi art market alongside its celebrated literary history. The Medeiros e Almeida Museum, which has already documented the Bensaúde episode in its research, could make that story more visible to visitors. A carefully researched panel, a fuller label beside a desk, or a few additional lines in an exhibition could bring these stories into public view.

Forty years after Portugal joined the EC, its transformation deserves celebration. But belonging to Europe involves more than membership, shared institutions, or economic prosperity. It also means accepting responsibility for the past that the European integration project inherited.

Buchholz and Medeiros e Almeida left behind very different legacies. Their names survive in two Lisbon landmarks, neither dedicated to Jewish memory, yet both carrying fragments of it.

Sometimes Europe's Jewish past is waiting behind the door of an ordinary bookshop. Sometimes inside an elegant collector's home.

And sometimes, to understand the Europe we celebrate, we need only open those doors.

ESSAY 31

Hungary's Vote, Jewish Choice

The Times of Israel, 10/4/2026. https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/hungarys-vote-jewish-choice/

Hungary's upcoming parliamentary election is not a distant European affair. For Israelis and Jews around the world, it raises a difficult question: When a government advances Israel's interests while weakening democratic norms, what should take priority? The uneasy reality is that Israel has been quick to embrace Viktor Orbán and slower to reflect on the broader implications of that choice.

After 16 years in power, Orbán now faces his most serious political challenge. His influence extends beyond Hungary. He has helped shape a governing approach that pairs electoral legitimacy with a gradual erosion of institutional checks. Media ownership has become more concentrated, the Central European University relocated under sustained political pressure, and judicial reforms have shifted the balance between courts and the executive. Civil society groups have also encountered mounting administrative constraints. These developments are not unique to Hungary, but Orbán has refined them in ways that have drawn attention across Europe.

For Israel, he has been a valuable partner. His government has consistently supported Israel in European forums, at times breaking with the broader European consensus. Since October 7, that backing has become even more visible. For Netanyahu's government, the logic is straightforward: dependable allies are scarce and should be preserved.

That logic is understandable, but it is not sufficient on its own.

Hungary is home to around 50,000 Jews, the largest Jewish community in Central and Eastern Europe. They are not a symbolic constituency but citizens living within a system that has undergone significant transformation, and their perspective often diverges from that of Israeli policymakers.

On the surface, conditions appear stable. Jewish institutions operate freely, and cultural and religious life continues without major disruption. The government supports Holocaust remembrance and condemns antisemitism in official statements. Compared with parts of Western Europe where Jewish communities face visible hostility, Budapest can seem relatively secure.

Yet concerns within the community extend beyond antisemitism. They relate to the broader direction of the state.

Orbán has described his system as an illiberal democracy, one that preserves elections while reshaping the institutional environment in which they take place. For many observers, this raises questions about the long-term strength of democratic norms. Jewish communities, shaped by historical experience, tend to view independent courts, strong institutions, and minority protections not as abstract ideals but as essential safeguards.

A parallel debate has unfolded in Israel in recent years. The Netanyahu government's efforts to overhaul the judiciary triggered widespread domestic opposition, with critics warning of the consequences of weakening institutional checks. Supporters argued that the reforms would restore balance between the branches of government. Regardless of where one stands, the comparison is difficult to ignore. In both countries, questions about the role of courts and the limits of executive power have moved to the center of political life. Many Israelis who resisted such changes at home may recognize similar patterns in Hungary's trajectory.

Orbán's political strategy adds to this unease. His government has often mobilized support by highlighting a shifting set of challenges, including European institutions, migration, and foreign influence. While these themes resonate with many voters, the broader pattern of organizing politics around recurring adversaries can raise concerns for communities with a long memory of exclusion, even when they are not the focus.

This dimension is often missing from Israeli discussions. When Netanyahu's government evaluates Orbán, it emphasizes strategic alignment, diplomatic backing, public statements, and bilateral ties. By those measures, the relationship is effective. Yet this perspective can overlook how Hungarian Jews experience the system from within. They are not dismissing Israel's diplomatic gains. They are asking whether the political environment around them will remain open, stable, and inclusive over time.

The opposition candidate, Péter Magyar, offers no simple alternative. As a relatively new figure with an evolving platform, he represents uncertainty as much as change. For many voters, supporting him reflects less a firm endorsement than a willingness to consider a different direction, particularly regarding institutional balance. It is a cautious choice shaped as much by concern about the current trajectory as by confidence in a clear alternative.

This should resonate in Israel.

Jewish history suggests that long-term security depends less on the preferences of any single political party than on the strength of the systems in which communities live. Political goodwill can change. Robust institutions provide continuity and protection.

Recognizing this does not require abandoning alliances or dismissing the value of Orbán's support. It does require acknowledging the trade-offs. Close ties with governments that back Israel internationally while raising questions about domestic governance create tensions that cannot be ignored.

If Orbán secures a decisive victory, his approach will likely continue to shape political debates across Europe. If he is weakened, it may reflect growing concern about institutional balance. Either outcome carries implications well beyond Hungary.

For Jews in Hungary and elsewhere, the issue is not only which result serves immediate diplomatic interests. It is also which one aligns with the conditions that have historically allowed Jewish communities to live with confidence and stability.

Those conditions are well known. They rest on the rule of law, independent institutions, and a political culture that protects diversity. In other words, they rest on democracy.

ESSAY 32

The Menorah at the European Check-In Counter

Jewish News Syndicate (JNS), 12/4/2026. https://www.jns.org/opinion/the-menorah-at-the-european-check-in-counter

Israel Today, 15/4/2026. https://www.israeltoday.co.il/read/the-menorah-at-the-european-check-in-counter/

Menorah-Hate at European Check-In Counters – The Jewish Star, 15/4/2026. https://www.thejewishstar.com/stories/menorah-hate-at-european-check-in-counters,26225

There is a moment every Israeli traveler knows. You are standing in a European airport – at the check-in counter, passport control or in the security line – and you reach into your bag. The small navy-blue booklet comes out, its cover bearing a menorah flanked by two olive branches, with the words “State of Israel” printed in English and Hebrew, and something in the air changes.

A glance. A pause that lasts half a second too long. An expression that requires no translation. You have not said a word. You have done nothing except exist with the wrong document in your hand.

Since October 7, 2023, and through the cascade of war that followed, traveling through Europe with an Israeli passport has become an exercise in performed invisibility. You tuck the document face down. You slide it under your palm on the counter. You are now an expert at the swift, low transfer from pocket to official

hand and back, minimizing the risk that anyone nearby might read the words on its cover.

Dimitry Kochenov, the "Passport Professor," whose 2019 MIT Press book *Citizenship* dissects the global passport hierarchy with surgical precision, writes that a passport "carries borders in one's pocket," and is not a neutral identity document but a condensed statement of one's place in the global hierarchy. He is right. What he could not have fully anticipated is that for the Israeli traveler in today's Europe, the passport carries something more visceral than hierarchy. It has become a target.

Kochenov argues that passports judge people "by the color of their passport and nothing else," making the document a practical measure of worth. The Israeli experience in European airports is that framework made flesh, a moment of eye contact, an awkward silence.

The check-in agent takes slightly longer than necessary, expressionless in a way that nonetheless conveys something dark. The security officer's questions drift from the procedural into something more editorial. The fellow passenger in the boarding line registers the navy booklet in your hand and shifts their weight, almost imperceptibly, away. The duty-free cashier whose warmth, freely extended to the travelers before and after you, runs briefly cold. No accusation is made. None is needed. The passport has already spoken.

It is the setting that makes all this so suffocating. Europe is not incidental here. This is the continent that spent centuries constructing the legal, theological and eventually biological architecture of Jewish exclusion. This is the continent whose 20th century produced the definitive proof of where that logic leads. And this is the continent that built its postwar identity around the vow of "never again."

The airports of Berlin and Amsterdam, Paris and Brussels are not neutral transit zones. They are built on specific ground, and Israelis moving through them carry that history in their bodies, not just their passports. When a fellow passenger gives you that look across the departure lounge, you are not simply a citizen of an unpopular state. You are a Jew in Europe being scrutinized. The layers do not separate cleanly.

In *Citizenship*, Kochenov argues that for most of the world, citizenship is primarily a liability rather than an asset, a blood-based allocation of burdens and privileges that reproduces global inequality at every border crossing. The Israeli passport was never a mobility superpower, long excluded from Arab states and fraught with complications across parts of Asia. But within the Western world, particularly Europe, it has carried full visa-free access, indistinguishable in practical terms from any other Western passport. A gateway, not a gate. This is eroding.

The formal visa arrangements remain unchanged, but the human texture of crossing has shifted in ways no bilateral agreement captures. Hostility leaves no paper trail. A look costs nothing and proves nothing. And yet it accumulates, checkpoint by checkpoint, until a flight becomes something to get through rather than enjoy.

There is a word that goes missing in the respectable discourse about Israeli policy and its contested morality. That word is antisemitism.

Not a criticism of a government. Not anger at a military operation. Not the entirely legitimate range of political positions one might hold about Gaza or the strikes on Iran. Antisemitism: the ancient, persistent, shape-shifting conviction that Jewish presence is itself the problem, that Jewish people carry their guilt collectively and wear it on their passports.

What is happening to Israeli travelers in European airports is not a political protest. Political protest is a banner unfurled outside an embassy. What is happening at the check-in counter is something older and more reflexive, updated for the current news cycle but drawing from the same well.

Kochenov wrote about the global architecture of citizenship, not about Jews in Europe. Yet his words – citizenship systems as instruments of "complacency, hypocrisy and domination" – land with uncomfortable precision on this continent and in this moment.

Europe mourns its historical antisemitism in museums and memorial days, in plaques and pedagogy, in solemn ceremonies at the sites of its greatest crimes. It is considerably slower to recognize the live version standing in its passport control lines, clutching a navy-blue booklet embossed with a menorah, waiting

to be waved through or held up, welcomed or made to feel like a problem that needs processing.

The Israeli traveler learns to expect it. Learns to minimize the exposure of that booklet, to read the room before reaching into your bag – to brace for the weight of judgment that arrives before a single word is exchanged. That is what it means to carry your place in the world in your pocket and know that in Europe, in 2026, that place is unwelcome.

The booklet has not changed. Europe has simply stopped pretending.

ESSAY 33

Between Remembrance and Independence, the European Academy Looks Away

Jewish News Syndicate (JNS), 21/4/2026. https://www.jns.org/opinion/between-remembrance-and-independence-the-european-academy-looks-away

Each year, Israeli society passes through a compressed emotional corridor. Within a single week, the country moves from Holocaust Memorial Day, mourning the near-destruction of European Jewry, to Independence Day, marking the restoration of Jewish sovereignty. Memory and statehood, vulnerability and self-determination, are held together in uneasy proximity.

For Israeli Jewish academics, this passage has always carried particular weight. Their intellectual traditions and scholarly lineages are deeply rooted in Europe – the same continent that produced some of the greatest centers of Jewish learning and then became the site of its near annihilation. The relationship was never simple, but for decades, it was sustained by shared academic values, genuine collaboration and the belief that intellectual life could remain open across political differences.

Since the Hamas-led terrorist attacks on October 7, 2023, that relationship has entered a period of serious strain.

Following the events of that Black Shabbat and the two-year war in Gaza that followed, Israeli Jewish scholars have experienced a marked shift in their standing within European academic circles. Partnerships that once seemed stable have weakened. Invitations have declined. Joint research initiatives have stalled. Communication that was once frequent has become intermittent, and in some cases, has simply ceased. The transformation is gradual and rarely announced, but it is widely felt.

The issue is not criticism. Forceful, sustained critique of Israeli government policy is a legitimate and necessary part of democratic discourse. Israeli scholars themselves participate vigorously in such debates. The concern lies elsewhere.

In public statements, demonstrations and academic spaces, a portion of the European scholarly community has moved from policy criticism toward the active endorsement of organizations whose declared aims include the targeting of civilians. Whatever the intent behind this shift, its effect on the professional environment has been significant. It has normalized rhetoric, and with it, habits that many Israeli academics reasonably experience as exclusionary.

The professional consequences follow a recognizable pattern. Collaborations go unpursued. Requests for participation go unanswered or are declined without explanation. Submissions are rejected. Recommendation letters arrive formally polite and substantively hollow. Occasionally, a European colleague will cite political commitments directly as a reason for being unavailable, a candor that clarifies what is more often left unspoken.

What defines this moment is withdrawal rather than confrontation. Academic relationships are rarely severed directly. They are allowed to fade. The language of collegiality is preserved. The substance of engagement is not.

This raises deeper questions about the ethical foundations of academic life. European academia has long claimed a commitment to intellectual openness, critical inquiry and universal human rights. Those commitments require the capacity to distinguish between solidarity with a civilian population and endorsement of those who deliberately target civilians, and the ability to hold

political convictions without allowing them to override analytical judgment or professional responsibility.

In parts of the current European academic climate, those distinctions have become harder to locate. Political identification increasingly functions as a filter, determining not only which positions are acceptable, but who is. The result is a narrowing of the intellectual environment itself – a loss of the friction and plurality on which serious inquiry depends.

The tendency is not universal. Many European scholars continue to engage constructively, reject the endorsement of violence and insist on the importance of dialogue across political differences. But the visibility of the opposing trend has been sufficient to reshape the atmosphere. Even where exclusion is not explicit, its perception alters behavior, producing caution, self-censorship and quiet withdrawal on both sides.

The proximity of the two days is not incidental to any of this. Holocaust Memorial Day is not only a national observance. It is also a reckoning with what became possible when European societies, including parts of their academic communities, failed to distinguish clearly between criticism, dehumanization and complicity.

Independence Day, which follows almost immediately, marks the founding of a state built on the premise that Jewish existence could no longer depend on the moral reliability of others.

Historical analogies must be used with care, and I am not drawing one. But for Israeli scholars who have invested a professional lifetime in the international academic community, the tension between integration and self-reliance is not theoretical. It is lived, and it is presently being recalibrated.

Whether the current fracture deepens or begins to heal will depend on whether academic communities on both sides are willing to live up to the principles they have long professed to hold.

ESSAY 34

‘We Have No Israel to Escape To’: Germany and Europe’s Crisis of Confidence

The Times of Israel, 22/5/2026. https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/we-have-no-israel-to-escape-to-germany-and-europes-crisis-of-confidence/

A German academic said it quietly at a faculty gathering in Frankfurt last week. The conversation had turned to Alternative for Germany (AfD) and to what might happen if the party entered government. Someone mentioned leaving the country. Someone else nodded. Then came the sentence that ended the conversation: “Jews have Israel. We have nowhere to go.”

The comparison was imperfect. It was also revealing. It did not mean Germany is returning to the 1930s, or that the AfD can be equated with the Nazis. It pointed to something more immediate: a loss of confidence, in Germany and across parts of Europe, that liberal democracy is as secure as many people once believed. For Jews, that fear has a history.

For decades, many Europeans assumed the political lessons of the 20th century had been absorbed. Nationalism, democratic breakdown, and exclusionary politics were treated as dangers Europe had overcome. Germany carried special weight in that story. After the Holocaust, it rebuilt its public life around constitutional limits, democratic institutions, and the duty of remembrance.

To many Jews and Israelis, postwar Germany showed that a society could change morally as well as materially. It offered Europe its strongest evidence that liberal democracy could restrain nationalism and hatred. That confidence is now weakening.

Chancellor Friedrich Merz faces some of the weakest approval ratings recorded for a postwar German leader. His coalition looks divided and tired. Meanwhile, the AfD is rising. A recent INSA poll put the party at 28%, ahead of all other parties. Polls are not election results, but in Germany such numbers have a particular

resonance. They also have practical consequences: they shape alliances, media attention, and the choices of mainstream parties.

Critics of the AfD accuse it of normalizing xenophobia and weakening the civic norms built after 1945. Supporters argue that it gives voice to legitimate anger over migration, economic stagnation, and a political class that ignored ordinary concerns for too long.

Both things can be true in different ways. Many AfD voters have real grievances. Ignoring them would deepen distrust. But democratic societies also have to draw a line between addressing public anger and accepting a politics that treats minorities as a threat or makes ethnic identity the measure of belonging.

What is different now is not simply the rise of nationalist parties. Europe has seen populist surges before. What is different is how openly educated professionals are asking whether they would stay in their countries if parties like the AfD became more prominent in actual governance. These conversations are taking place in universities, churches, cafés, and homes. Doctors, journalists, engineers, and academics talk about leaving not mainly because of war or the economy, but because they fear a political culture built on resentment and contempt for pluralism. When people like that begin to plan for departure, democracy is already under pressure.

The reference to Jewish history is uncomfortable and must be handled carefully. Contemporary Germany is not Weimar Germany. The AfD is not the Nazi Party. The remark in Frankfurt was not a serious historical analogy. It was an expression of fear that democratic stability may be less durable than many Europeans had assumed. It reached for Jewish experience because Jewish history gives that fear its most severe example.

Jews understand this fragility in a particular way. Jewish life in Europe has often depended on political conditions that could change quickly. Israel emerged in part from the recognition that even advanced European societies could turn against Jews under conditions of fear, polarization, and institutional weakness. At the same time, Jewish life in Europe has flourished when liberal norms, strong institutions, and civic pluralism were protected. For many Jews, Israel's security and European democracy once seemed to reinforce each other.

That relationship is now harder to describe. For decades, European support for Israel came mainly from liberal democratic parties shaped by Holocaust

memory and by postwar commitments to minority rights. That has changed. Some nationalist and Eurosceptic movements are now among Israel's strongest supporters in Europe, even as they promote political cultures that many liberal Jews regard with unease.

Successive Netanyahu governments have cultivated these relationships. They have used them to reduce pressure from European Union institutions critical of Israeli policy. There are also real ideological affinities: an emphasis on national sovereignty, suspicion of supranational bodies, and hostility toward parts of the liberal international order.

This creates a serious dilemma. Some of the loudest pro-Israel voices in Europe now come from parties that challenge the democratic assumptions on which secure Jewish life in the diaspora has depended. For Jews watching Israel and Europe at the same time, old categories no longer work neatly. The Frankfurt remark hurt because it relied on a distinction that once seemed clear: Jews had a refuge, while Europeans had stable liberal democracies. Today, neither side of that distinction feels simple.

The answer cannot be to dismiss every nationalist voter as an extremist. Many people turning to the AfD or similar parties feel ignored by leaders who speak fluently about values but less convincingly about security, wages, schools, housing, and social cohesion. Democracies have to take those concerns seriously. But they cannot do so by normalizing language that casts minorities as permanent outsiders or by weakening the institutions that protect equal citizenship.

Europe learned through catastrophe that democratic erosion usually does not arrive all at once. It advances through polarization, exhausted institutions, and the slow loss of trust. That is why the Frankfurt remark matters. Its importance lies less in its historical accuracy than in what it revealed about the return of political doubt in societies that thought they had moved beyond it.

Germany has long been Europe's most important example of democratic recovery. If Germans themselves begin to doubt the durability of that recovery, the consequences will not remain German. Jews have reason to take that doubt seriously. So should Europe.

ESSAY 35

When Pride Meets Prejudice

The Times of Israel, 9/6/2026. https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/when-pride-meets-prejudice/
When Pride Meets Prejudice: Europe's LGBTQ Movement is Forgetting What Inclusion Means – Opinion – The Jerusalem Post, 25/8/2026. https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-906413
The Jerusalem Post Printed Edition, 26/8/2026, page 10.

This week, I met two European friends, a gay couple based in Brussels. One is a teacher; the other works for an international organization in the city. They spend every summer in Israel. For them, Tel Aviv remains the perfect vacation destination, even today.

"The moment we arrive at the El Al check-in counter and people realize we are a couple, the red carpet is rolled out for us," they told me.

It was heartening to hear, especially now. Since the October 7 massacre, a growing rift has emerged between Israel and influential segments of organized LGBTQ activism across Europe. The disagreement is no longer simply about the war in Gaza but about solidarity, moral consistency, and the meaning of universal values.

For decades, Israel was widely regarded as part of the liberal democratic family to which Europe also belongs. Tel Aviv became one of the world's leading Pride destinations and a symbol of openness in a region where same-sex relations remain criminalized in many states and LGBTQ people face persecution.

Israeli and European organizations worked together to advance equality, combat discrimination, and protect minority rights. Even when they disagreed over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, they still regarded one another as partners committed to the same democratic ideals.

That sense of partnership has been badly shaken.

The war in Gaza has caused immense civilian suffering, which deserves sustained attention and public debate. Yet for many Israelis, another striking feature of public discourse has been the relative silence surrounding the atrocities that

precipitated the war: the October 7 massacre, the widespread sexual violence documented by United Nations investigators, and the prolonged captivity of the hostages, some for more than two years.

The issue is not whether Israel should be criticized. Democracies invite scrutiny, and Israel is no exception. The issue is whether empathy has become selective. When public discourse recognizes only one side's suffering, it loses the moral complexity required to understand a conflict in which civilians on both sides have paid a terrible price.

The modern LGBTQ movement achieved remarkable victories by insisting that rights belong to every individual, regardless of political opinion, nationality, religion, or ethnicity. That principle transformed societies, changed laws, and expanded liberty for millions.

An advocacy movement need not endorse every political position. It should, however, distinguish criticism of Israeli policy from treating Jewish or Israeli identity as prima facie evidence of culpability or complicity. When participation is conditioned on repudiating one's nationality or communal ties, inclusion becomes a political loyalty test.

The consequences extend beyond politics. Universities, cultural institutions, civil society organizations, and Pride events have become arenas where Israeli and Jewish participation is contested, and Jewish organizations have at times been expected to distance themselves from Israel before being accepted as legitimate partners.

During WorldPride Amsterdam this August, unauthorized flyers bearing the logos of the city, WorldPride, and the anti-discrimination platform RITA displayed the names, photographs, and locations of Israeli and Jewish artists, as well as people described as IDF soldiers. Readers were urged to "watch out for war criminals." WorldPride organizers, the municipality, and RITA disavowed the flyers, and the police opened an investigation.

In Berlin, a participant at a Christopher Street Day march reported being harassed over Israeli symbols. Whether viewed individually or as part of a broader pattern, these incidents raise an uncomfortable question: Why has the presence of Jews

and Israelis in spaces intended to foster inclusion begun to attract suspicion and, at times, intimidation?

Political coalitions often unite unlikely partners, and shared opposition to one issue – Israeli policy – can eclipse disagreements on other matters. But when universal principles become subordinate to political alignment, something essential is lost.

Selective defense of rights

A movement that asks society to defend rights without qualification cannot defend those same rights selectively. This is not simply a question of political consistency. It is a moral challenge.

How can organizations dedicated to protecting minorities overlook antisemitism within coalitions they otherwise embrace? Israeli organizations are not immune from criticism.

The test is whether Jews and Israelis can participate without being treated as representatives of a government or required to prove their political innocence. In some places, simply being visibly Jewish or Israeli is enough to make people feel unwelcome in a movement founded on inclusion.

The incidents in Amsterdam and Berlin do not prove that an entire movement has abandoned its ideals. But they do show why Jews and Israelis in some LGBTQ spaces increasingly fear that visibility will bring suspicion rather than solidarity.

This tension also reflects a broader divide between Israel and Europe. Israeli public discourse often begins with the security trauma of October 7, while European debate often begins with the humanitarian devastation of Gaza. Both speak the language of human rights but are rooted in different wounds. Each perspective becomes morally incomplete when it erases the other.

The debate, therefore, extends far beyond Israel. It is ultimately about whether liberal societies remain capable of defending their principles consistently, including when doing so is politically inconvenient. A universal value ceases to be universal once it is applied selectively.

At their best, Europe's LGBTQ movements have demonstrated that equality is meaningful precisely when it protects people who are unpopular or politically isolated. Their challenge now is to uphold that principle when Jews or Israelis are the ones asking for inclusion. That is where moral leadership begins. It is also where prejudice, however carefully disguised in the language of tolerance, is finally exposed.

My two friends have already booked an apartment in Tel Aviv for next summer. They still see Israel as a place where they are welcomed for who they are. That welcome should not remain the exception. If Europe's LGBTQ movement wants to honor the principle it was built on, it must ask why that welcome is fading and start extending it again.

ESSAY 36

When Europe's Political Language Shapes Jewish Life

The Times of Israel, 12/6/2026. https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/when-europes-political-language-shapes-jewish-life/

A recent report published by Euractiv has raised troubling questions not only about European Union (EU) foreign policy but also about the future of Jewish life in Europe.

According to the report, EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas compared Israel's treatment of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank to apartheid era South Africa during confidential meetings with Mexican officials in May. Diplomats cited by Euractiv reportedly expressed concern that the remarks departed from established EU policy, with one official describing it as a serious problem if such statements were being made by the person tasked with representing all 27 member states on the world stage.

Predictably, the debate that followed has focused on the Middle East. Was the comparison justified? Did Kallas overstep her mandate? Does her position reflect a broader shift within EU institutions?

These questions matter. Yet they risk obscuring another issue that may ultimately prove more consequential: what happens when the language used to judge the Jewish state begins to shape the way Jewish communities themselves are perceived?

That question should concern anyone who cares about the future of democratic pluralism in Europe.

For decades, European leaders have insisted on an important distinction. Criticism of Israeli government policy is not the same as hostility toward Jews. In principle, that distinction is both correct and essential. Democracies require open debate, and Israel should be subject to scrutiny like any other democratic state.

The problem begins when criticism shifts from specific policies to sweeping judgments about the nature of the state itself.

The term apartheid is not simply another political accusation. It carries immense historical and emotional weight. It refers to one of the most notorious systems of racial oppression in modern history. It evokes a regime that became a global symbol of institutional injustice and moral illegitimacy.

When such language is used by the EU's highest foreign policy representative, the implications become far greater.

The issue is not merely whether the comparison is accurate. The issue is that such language reshapes the framework through which Israel is understood.

Israel is no longer presented as a democracy confronting difficult security challenges while making controversial decisions. Instead, it is cast as the contemporary equivalent of a regime whose very existence came to be regarded as morally indefensible.

That shift does not remain confined to diplomatic discussions.

It influences public debate. It shapes media coverage. It reaches universities, workplaces, civic and cultural institutions, and social media platforms. Over

time, it contributes to a climate in which support for Israel becomes increasingly suspect and identification with Israel increasingly controversial.

For European Jews, the consequences are often personal rather than theoretical.

Since the October 7 massacre, Europe has witnessed a sharp resurgence of antisemitism. Jewish communities have endured terrorist attacks alongside a disturbing increase in threats, harassment, vandalism, and physical violence. For many European Jews, this is not a distant political trend but an everyday reality. At the same time, they are often treated as stand-ins for the actions of a government over which they have no influence. As a result, debates about Israel are rarely experienced as abstract questions of foreign policy. Their consequences are felt in Jewish schools, community centers, and synagogues, in workplaces and universities, and in public spaces across the continent. For many Jews, discussions about Israel are inseparable from concerns about their own security, belonging, and place within European society.

Unlike most minority communities in Europe, Jews are frequently expected to explain, justify, condemn, or distance themselves from the actions of a foreign state. Whether fair or not, they are often treated as representatives of a conflict taking place thousands of kilometers away. That reality helps explain why the language used by senior EU officials about Israel rarely remains confined to foreign policy.

When Israel is cast as the contemporary equivalent of apartheid South Africa, the consequences extend far beyond the Middle East. Many European Jews find themselves judged through the prism of that accusation. Expressions of solidarity become suspect. Silence is treated as complicity. The distinction between criticism of a government and perceptions of an entire community begins to erode, leaving many Jews to navigate suspicions and expectations that no other minority is routinely asked to bear.

This is not necessarily because those making such accusations harbor hostility toward Jews. Most do not.

The problem is that political narratives often produce consequences far beyond the intentions of those who create them.

When a state closely associated with Jewish identity is repeatedly portrayed as uniquely malevolent, some people inevitably begin to view Jewish communities through the same framework. The distinction between Israel and Jews, so carefully defended in theory, becomes increasingly difficult to sustain in practice.

European leaders should understand this dynamic better than most.

The continent's history offers repeated examples of how exclusion rarely begins with dramatic acts of persecution. More often, it begins with narratives that place minorities outside the moral mainstream. It begins with assumptions that certain groups require special scrutiny or are somehow uniquely responsible for broader social and political problems.

No serious observer would suggest that Europe today resembles the Europe of darker eras. Such comparisons would be both inaccurate and irresponsible.

Yet history remains relevant because it demonstrates how public attitudes are shaped. Language matters. Symbols matter. Narratives matter. The way political leaders frame events influences how societies understand entire communities.

This is why the Euractiv report matters far beyond Brussels.

The concern is not simply that Kallas may have diverged from official EU policy. The concern is that one of the Union's most influential voices appears willing to adopt a framework that many citizens will interpret not as criticism of particular policies but as a broader indictment of the Jewish state itself.

That matters because Europe's Jewish communities are confronting growing uncertainty about their place in the societies they call home. Antisemitism does not emerge from a single source, nor can it be reduced to a single cause. Yet responsible leadership requires an understanding that rhetoric from positions of authority helps shape the moral climate in which societies operate.

Political language is never neutral. The words of senior officials carry weight. They help define the boundaries of acceptable discourse, shape public perceptions, and influence attitudes long after the headlines have faded.

European leaders have every right to criticize Israeli policies. They have every right to advocate for Palestinian rights and for a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

What they should avoid is adopting language that reduces a complex and tragic conflict to a simple morality tale, one that portrays Israel not as a state whose policies can be debated and criticized, but as a uniquely illegitimate actor on the world stage.

The real significance of the Euractiv report extends far beyond a dispute over foreign policy.

It raises a broader question about the responsibility of the EU's political leaders. Do they fully understand what happens when language used to judge the Jewish state begins to shape the way European Jewish communities themselves are perceived?

Words spoken behind closed doors rarely stay there. When they come from those who speak on behalf of the EU, they help define the moral vocabulary of the continent itself. That reality should give Europe's leaders pause.

ESSAY 37

Where Europe Places Its Jews

The Times of Israel, 21/7/2026. https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/where-europe-places-its-jews/

A few weeks ago, I walked into a second-hand bookstore and bought a novel by Antonio Tabucchi, the Italian writer whose devotion to Fernando Pessoa and Lisbon had recently drawn me into his work. Only later did I open the first page and notice a dedication, written by Tabucchi himself, dated 1998 and signed in Tel Aviv. He had given the book to the library of the Italian Cultural Institute there. Somehow, over nearly three decades, it had left the library and traveled through other shelves before reaching mine.

Tabucchi would probably have appreciated the coincidence. His fiction is filled with displaced objects and people who discover that history has been waiting quietly for them. He understood that one learns a great deal about a society by watching whom it places at the center and whom it moves toward the margins. His migrants, Roma, and political exiles are never simply figures in a landscape.

They reveal who belongs, who must explain their presence, and who is quietly moved outside the story a nation tells about itself.

That question of who belongs at the center and who is moved toward the margins is worth asking about Europe and its Jews.

In the decades after World War II, Europe symbolically relocated its Jews. The people who had been expelled, stripped of citizenship, and murdered were placed at the moral center of the postwar European order. Jewish memory became European memory. Auschwitz became a negative foundation for European identity, and antisemitism became a warning sign of democratic collapse. Synagogues were restored, memorials built, and schoolchildren sent to visit camps. This transformation was real. The European Union helped institutionalize it through law, education, and commemoration.

But reading Tabucchi now raises an uncomfortable question: Where does Europe place its living Jews? The harder test is whether Europe can criticize Israeli power without treating individual Jews or Israelis as extensions of that power.

Since October 7, 2023, something has shifted in parts of European academic and cultural life. European Jews and Israeli scholars are not the same constituency, but they are increasingly treated as though they were. The identity markers Jewish, Israeli, and Zionist are not synonymous, yet they often blur into one political category. Some Jewish students are asked to clarify their position on Gaza before speaking simply as students. Some Israeli academics find that their affiliation requires justification. A project becomes "complicated." An invitation fails to arrive.

None of this proves that Europe as a whole has become antisemitic, or that criticism of Israel is antisemitic. Certainly, the devastation in Gaza and the conduct of Israel's government and military demand scrutiny. The problem begins when responsibility for a state's actions is transferred to individuals: a Jewish student in Amsterdam is treated as a representative of the Israeli government; an Israeli scholar in Brussels is cast as its emissary, though she may oppose it; anger over a distant war spills into hostility toward Jewish institutions closer to home.

This is where I keep thinking of Pereira. In Pereira Maintains, Tabucchi gives us a journalist in Salazar's Portugal who shelters in literature, translation, and

obituaries, hoping to remain outside politics. Pereira is cultured, thoughtful, and decent; he simply prefers the safety of his intellectual world. History refuses him that privilege. Slowly, he learns that silence is also a position and that culture cannot forever hide from the world outside it.

Europe today is not Salazar's Portugal. The analogy is narrower: Pereira's temptation to mistake silence for neutrality remains recognizable. It often comes to mind while watching some European institutions since October 7. Universities that spoke eloquently about other crises turned reticent when Israeli scholars faced exclusion or partnerships with Israeli institutions came under pressure. Colleagues who privately said the massacre horrified them explained that saying so publicly had become too complicated.

Almost none of this exclusion arrives as a declaration. No letter announces that Jews or Israelis have been pushed to the edges of institutional life. A partnership is reconsidered. A proposed visit becomes awkward. An invitation disappears. Pereira would recognize the temptation to retreat into scholarship rather than ask what is happening to the person who used to sit at the table.

For decades, Europe found it easier to honor Jewish memory than to accommodate Jewish agency. The dead could be commemorated without being argued with. The living disagree. They vote across the spectrum; some are secular and some devout, some oppose Zionism, and others regard Israel as central to their identity. They are not symbols. They are people, and people are inconvenient in a way memory never is.

Israel sharpens that difficulty because it is the most visible institutional expression of modern Jewish sovereignty. It does not speak for all Jews, but it makes Jewish power impossible to encounter only as memory. It has an army, exercises power, and has governments whose decisions may deserve severe judgment. For a European imagination partly built around Jewish victimhood, a sovereign Jewish state can be an unsettling presence.

None of this absolves Israel of responsibility. Power demands scrutiny, and political agency carries consequences. Israel cannot claim the moral immunity of the powerless while insisting on its sovereign right to act. But responsibility belongs to governments, institutions, and decision-makers. It does not pass by

association to a Jewish student in a seminar room or an Israeli scholar applying for a grant.

Europe's real test is whether it can criticize Israeli power without making Jewish belonging conditional on distance from that power. Can its universities protect academic freedom when the threatened researcher is Israeli? Can its cultural institutions engage with living Jews whose politics are inconvenient, rather than only with the dead whose politics can no longer trouble anyone?

I keep returning to the book. In 1998, Tabucchi signed it in Tel Aviv and gave it to the library of the Italian Cultural Institute. Decades later, it reached a second-hand bookstore and then my desk. He taught readers to look toward the margins, where societies place the people who complicate the stories they prefer to tell about themselves.

For decades, the test for Europe was whether it could mourn the Jews it had lost. The test now is whether it can make room for the argumentative, contradictory, and inconvenient Jews who are still here.

ESSAY 38

One Europe, Two Reasons to Leave

The Jerusalem Post Printed Edition, 29/7/2026, page 9.

European Jews Migrate for Unparalleled Reasons Now – Opinion – The Jerusalem Post, 29/7/2026. https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-903774

Nearly half of the adults in France, Germany, Italy, and the UK expect to live abroad at some point in their lives, a survey by Euronews found.

Rising living costs, rather than adventure, are the main motivation. For many Europeans, comparing salaries, housing costs, taxes, and quality of life across borders has become routine.

Relocating is no longer seen as a dramatic break with the past, but as a practical strategy for building a better future.

Yet there is another migration story the survey never asked about. For many Jews across Europe, the question is not simply where life might be cheaper or more comfortable. It is whether life will remain safe.

The difference matters. A Danish physician considering a transfer to Stockholm or a German baker attracted by lower rents in Sofia is weighing income against lifestyle. Many Jewish families are weighing something else entirely.

Will my son still feel comfortable wearing a kippah on the metro? Will our children's Jewish school still require police protection three years from now?

Is hostility toward Jews a passing wave or a permanent feature of European life? And if the time ever comes to leave, do we look for another home in Europe, or do we begin again in Israel or Canada?

These are not abstract questions. Since Hamas's October 7 massacre, recorded antisemitic incidents have remained alarmingly high across much of Europe.

In the UK, the Community Security Trust logged 3,700 antisemitic incidents in 2025, its second-highest annual total on record.

Similar trends have been reported elsewhere in Europe. For many European Jews, migration has quietly returned to family conversations – not because most intend to leave, but because the question no longer feels unimaginable.

None of this means that Jewish life in Europe is collapsing. Jewish communities remain vibrant from London to Budapest, from Amsterdam to Rome.

Universities, cultural institutions, and businesses continue to benefit enormously from Jewish communities and their contributions. Yet confidence, once taken for granted, now requires constant reassurance. That inevitably changes how people imagine the future.

A sense of safety is shaped not only by crime statistics but also by the quiet adjustments people make without ever speaking about them.

When a university student hesitates before mentioning being Jewish during a classroom discussion, something has already changed. When a family thinks

twice before placing a mezuzah on the front door of a new home, the calculation is no longer theoretical. It has become personal.

Jews keep the option of moving abroad as a form of insurance

Against that backdrop, the survey revealed a second story.

For most Europeans, moving abroad represents an opportunity. For many Jews, the option of moving abroad increasingly resembles a form of insurance – something they hope never to need but feel reassured to have.

That distinction reveals one of the quiet paradoxes of contemporary Europe. The European Union was built on the promise that national borders would gradually lose their significance.

Free movement became one of the defining achievements of European integration. For most Europeans today, crossing a border symbolizes opportunity and ambition.

Jewish history complicates that picture. For centuries, Jews crossed borders not in search of new horizons, but because circumstances left them little choice.

Migration meant survival long before it meant advancement. That historical memory has never entirely faded, and it continues to shape how many European Jews interpret today's headlines.

Security concerns, of course, are no longer confined to Jewish communities. Russia's war against Ukraine, geopolitical tensions, economic uncertainty, and political polarization have reminded Europeans that peace and stability cannot be taken for granted. Yet for Europe's Jews, insecurity carries an additional historical weight.

Israel occupies a unique place in this story. It was founded in part to ensure that Jews would always have a sovereign refuge. This does not mean that every European Jew wishes to move there. Most do not. Nor does it suggest that Jewish life in Europe has become untenable.

Such a conclusion would ignore the remarkable vitality of Jewish communities across the continent. Rather, Israel functions as a permanent point of reference, shaping decisions even when no move is ever made.

Previous generations searched for any country willing to receive them. Today's European Jews know that one country will always remain open to them.

The irony is striking. At the very moment that some European Jews quietly weigh their future with Israel in mind, many Israelis continue to pursue Portuguese, German, Romanian, or other EU citizenship through family ancestry.

Despite growing political tensions between Jerusalem and several European capitals, Europe remains a magnet for Israelis seeking education, careers, cultural life, and sporting opportunities.

The destinations may sometimes overlap. The motivations rarely do.

This distinction deserves greater attention from European policymakers. Governments have invested significant resources in combating antisemitism through legislation, policing, and education.

These efforts matter, but they cannot fully address the psychological dimension of belonging. Communities judge their future not only by arrest statistics or government statements but also by the tone of public discourse, the willingness of neighbors to speak out when hatred appears, and whether Jews feel able to express their identity openly in universities, workplaces, and public spaces.

Belonging cannot be legislated. It must be lived.

The survey captures an important aspect of contemporary Europe. Citizens increasingly treat borders as practical choices rather than fixed destinies. That flexibility remains one of the EU's greatest achievements.

But that freedom does not mean the same thing to everyone. For most Europeans, leaving is about opportunity. For many Jews, it is also about protection.

The ultimate measure of Europe's success will not be the freedom of its citizens to leave. It will be whether Europe's Jews continue to believe they have no reason to leave.

ESSAY 39

Hungary's Jews Need More Than a Pro-Israel President

The Times of Israel, 10/8/2026. https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/hungarys-jews-need-more-than-a-pro-israel-president/

Szombat Online, 11/08/2026. https://www.szombat.org/politika/a-magyar-zsidoknak-tobbre-van-szukseguk-egy-izrael-barat-elnoknel

Hungary is about to elect a new president, and this time the choice is not Viktor Orbán's. Péter Magyar's Tisza party, which won a landslide election in April and holds a constitutional majority in parliament, has nominated András Baka, the former president of Hungary's Supreme Court whom Orbán's government removed from that position in 2012. Parliament is expected to confirm him this week, and the symbolism is difficult to miss. Tisza has framed the nomination as a statement about judicial independence and the rule of law, principles Baka came to personify after his removal.

For Hungarian Jews, and for those watching Hungary from Israel, the nomination raises another question. What does Baka's long career tell us about his attitudes toward Jews, antisemitism, Holocaust memory, and Israel?

Baka has no substantial public record on Israel and has not been a prominent participant in Hungary's often contentious debates about the Jewish state. It would be misleading to describe him as either pro-Israel or anti-Israel.

He does, however, have a documented judicial record on Jewish issues, found mainly in his years as Hungary's judge at the European Court of Human Rights from 1991 to 2008. Several cases in which he participated concerned antisemitism, the Holocaust, and Jewish religious practice, offering clues about the principles he has been prepared to defend.

One of the most important concerns the boundary between freedom of expression and Holocaust denial. In the 1998 case *Lehideux and Isorni v. France*, the Court considered the conviction of two men who had published material favorable to Marshal Philippe Pétain, leader of the collaborationist Vichy regime. Baka sat on

the Grand Chamber and joined the majority in finding that France had violated their freedom of expression.

The conclusion is easily misunderstood. The Court was not legitimizing Holocaust denial. It drew a distinction between controversial interpretations of the past, which democratic societies must generally tolerate, and denial of the Holocaust itself, a clearly established fact that could fall outside the Convention's protection. Democracy tolerates arguments many find offensive. It does not require treating denial of the destruction of Europe's Jews as merely another opinion. Baka joined the majority that drew that line.

A more revealing case followed. In *Giniewski v. France*, Baka presided over the Chamber. The applicant, Daniel Giniewski, a journalist and historian of Jewish origin, had written critically about Catholic teachings, arguing that certain doctrines concerning Judaism had contributed to antisemitism and ultimately to the conditions that made Auschwitz possible. French courts punished him for religious defamation. The Court, with Baka presiding, unanimously found a violation, recognizing that examining the roots of antisemitism was a legitimate matter of public concern.

Protecting minorities does not mean shielding society from difficult conversations. It means preserving the space in which uncomfortable questions can be asked.

Baka's approach to Jewish religious freedom is more nuanced. In *Cha'are Shalom Ve Tsedek v. France*, an Orthodox Jewish association argued that France had violated religious freedom by refusing to authorize it to perform ritual slaughter under its own strict standards. Baka joined the Grand Chamber majority, finding no violation, reasoning that observant Jews remained able to obtain meat satisfying their requirements without that authorization. This was not an expansive reading of minority rights. It reflected proportionality: religious freedom must be genuine and practicable, but the state need not accommodate every institutional preference.

Baka also participated in *Stoll v. Switzerland*, arising from the dispute over Jewish assets left in Swiss banks after the Holocaust, and in a family law case involving Israel. Neither reveals hostility toward Israel nor particular attachment to it.

Nothing here supports portraying Baka as an opponent of Israel or as indifferent to Jewish concerns. Yet it would be equally misleading to manufacture a pro-Israel politician from a judicial record that does not support that conclusion. What emerges instead is a jurist shaped by a European legal vocabulary: religious liberty, free expression, historical memory, minority protection, and institutional restraint.

That same outlook eventually placed Baka in conflict with the Hungarian state. In 2011, while president of the Supreme Court, he publicly criticized changes to the judiciary introduced by Orbán's government. Parliament reorganized the judicial system in a way that ended his mandate before its scheduled expiration. Baka took Hungary to Strasbourg, and in 2016 the Grand Chamber found that Hungary had violated his Convention rights, concluding that the premature end of his mandate had been prompted by views he expressed professionally and had interfered with judicial independence.

The jurist who spent years applying European rights standards to others found himself protected by those same standards.

That episode matters for what a Baka presidency might mean for Hungarian Jews. Under Orbán, Hungary's relationship with Israel became closely tied to a political partnership between governments, with Budapest presenting itself as one of Israel's strongest allies in Europe. Yet the same period produced controversies over Hungary's responsibility for the Holocaust, the rehabilitation of controversial historical figures, and campaigns against George Soros that drew on antisemitic tropes.

Baka represents a different tradition. If his record is a guide, his instinct is less likely to begin with whether Budapest enjoys good relations with Jerusalem than with whether Hungary protects Jews as equal citizens, safeguards religious liberty, confronts antisemitism, and deals honestly with its past.

Those are not the same thing.

A government can maintain excellent relations with Israel while Jewish citizens feel uncomfortable at home, or disagree sharply with an Israeli government while remaining deeply committed to protecting Jewish life. The health of Jewish communities cannot be measured through diplomacy with Jerusalem alone.

Hungary's president has limited formal power. But presidents help define the moral vocabulary of the state, choosing which anniversaries to mark, which wounds to acknowledge, and which democratic boundaries deserve defense.

Baka's time on the bench cannot tell us exactly how he will use that role. Judicial decisions are collective acts, not political manifestos. But they offer a compass, pointing toward an order in which Holocaust denial is not merely another interpretation of the past, antisemitism is treated with particular seriousness, religious minorities receive meaningful protection and honest debate about Europe's responsibility for the persecution of its Jews remains possible.

For Hungary's Jews, that may ultimately be a more meaningful test of a president than how warmly Budapest speaks about Israel.

ESSAY 40

Péter Nádas, the Nobel Contender Who Saw a Jew in the Mirror

The Times of Israel, 27/8/2026. https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/peter-nadas-the-nobel-contender-who-saw-a-jew-in-the-mirror/

Péter Nádas died Wednesday morning, August 26, 2026, at his home in Gombosszeg, Hungary. He was 83, one of the giants of postwar European literature and a writer whose name had long appeared in speculation about the Nobel Prize.

I learned of his death three days after finishing the only one of his books ever translated into Hebrew.

The coincidence felt unsettling. "*The End of a Family Story*," published in Hungary in 1977, appeared in Hebrew in 2006, translated directly from Hungarian by David

Tarbay and published by Am Oved. Despite the author's enormous international reputation, it remains his only complete book available to Hebrew readers.

I struggled with it.

For much of the first part, I was not even certain that I liked it. The novel follows a boy growing up with his grandparents in Stalinist Hungary in the 1950s. His mother is dead. His father, caught in the murky world of the communist security apparatus, is mostly absent. The narrative moves through childhood games, memories, fantasies, and fragments of conversation without always telling us where reality ends, and imagination begins.

Some of it disturbed me. I disliked the children's cruelty toward animals. I disliked the uncomfortable, sometimes brutal relationships among the children themselves. There were moments when I wondered why I was continuing.

But I did.

Gradually, I began to understand that the difficulty was not accidental. Something extraordinary was happening beneath the surface. I began to feel that I was holding a jewel whose beauty I had not yet learned how to see.

And then the book changed for me.

Or perhaps I finally understood what book I was reading.

Through his grandfather's stories, the boy begins to discover where he comes from. The old man reaches backward through generations, mixing personal memory with biblical stories, Christianity, persecution, and the fate of Europe's Jews. What had seemed like a strange and sometimes unpleasant childhood narrative suddenly opened onto something enormous.

Family history becomes Jewish history, and Jewish history becomes European history.

I could not stop reading. Three days later, its author was dead.

Perhaps this is an appropriate way for an Israeli reader to encounter Nádas, because his own origins seem to have confronted him in something like this fashion: indirectly, uncomfortably, and without asking permission.

Born in Budapest in 1942 to Jewish parents, he came into the world at one of the darkest moments in European history. His parents were communists. The family survived the Holocaust through hiding and false identities. After the war, he and his brother were baptized as Calvinists. Judaism was not the organizing principle of his childhood.

He later resisted attempts to make it the organizing principle of his identity.

"I am not Jewish," he said in a 2007 interview. He explained that he opposed antisemitism and the Holocaust as a human being, not because membership in a particular group required him to do so.

It is an arresting declaration from a writer whose work returned so insistently to the world from which he came. But it reflected his resistance to collective identities claiming ownership over the individual. He distrusted nationalism, ideological certainty, and the proposition that ancestry should determine moral allegiance.

And yet the past kept returning.

His own ancestry led directly into one of the great arguments of modern Jewish life.

His great-grandfather, Mór Mezei, and Mór's younger brother Ernő belonged to the remarkable world of emancipated Hungarian Jewry. They believed deeply in equality, citizenship, and Hungarian patriotism. Mór was a leading advocate of emancipation. Ernő became a member of parliament.

And Ernő argued with Theodor Herzl.

In 1903, Herzl wrote to Mezei that he would gladly concede Hungary's Jews to Hungary if he could believe their patriotism would protect them from antisemitism. He did not believe it would. Antisemitism, Herzl warned, would eventually strike them with terrible force.

Four decades later, the community was devastated in the Holocaust.

Writing about that exchange more than a century afterward in "Illuminated Details," Nádas offered a stark verdict: "And how right Tivadar Herzl was."

For an Israeli reader, it is tempting to stop there. Herzl was right. Assimilation failed. Zionism understood something that Europe's emancipated Jews did not.

But Nádas would not allow the argument to end so neatly. Recognizing Herzl's diagnosis did not turn him into a Zionist. He remained suspicious of nationalism, whether Hungarian or Jewish. The failure of assimilation did not persuade him that nationalism supplied the complete answer.

He lived inside that contradiction rather than resolving it.

Perhaps the most powerful expression of it appears in a childhood memory. As a boy, Nádas once told his mother that he hated Jews. She directed him toward his own reflection.

There was a Jew he could hate.

The image is devastating because it requires almost no explanation. A child can know little about Judaism. His parents can be communists. He can be baptized into another faith. He can grow up understanding himself through an entirely different set of categories.

And still the mirror can tell another story.

That is what makes Nádas so compelling to read from Israel. His work asks what happens when the identity we choose encounters the identity carried by memory, ancestry, and the eyes of others. He knew that emancipation had not saved his ancestors. But he also refused to surrender the individual to the collective.

That tension apparently remained with him until the end.

János Kőbányai, editor of the Hungarian Jewish journal "*Múlt és Jövő*," wrote after his death that Nádas had repeatedly declined invitations to publish in the journal but remained a subscriber throughout his life. Kőbányai also refers to an expression of solidarity by Nádas concerning developments in the war in Gaza following October 7, 2023.

He does not explain what that solidarity entailed, and it would be wrong to turn the reference into a political position we cannot document. What matters here is simply that the conversation had not disappeared.

The writer who resisted being classified as a Jewish writer remained engaged with the questions from which that classification arose.

There is something almost embarrassing about how little opportunity Israelis have had to read him. "*A Book of Memories*," "*Parallel Stories*," and "*Illuminated Details*," among his most important works, have never appeared in Hebrew. From a vast literary career, we have one book.

But what a book to have.

Three days ago, when I closed "*The End of a Family Story*," I was thinking about the strange transformation that had occurred while reading it. I had begun impatiently, resisting its cruelty and fragmented world. Somewhere along the way, as the grandfather began telling the boy where he came from, resistance became fascination.

I thought I was reading about an unhappy boy in Stalinist Hungary. I discovered that I was reading about inheritance: a child learning that he belongs to a story he did not choose and barely knew existed.

Perhaps that is also what Péter Nádas leaves us.

We choose some of our identities. Others are imposed upon us. And some wait quietly inside the stories of our families until, one day, we discover that we have been carrying them all along.

ESSAY 41

Shabbat Dinner in a Former Danish Church

Jerusalem News Syndicate (JNS), 28/8/2026. https://www.jns.org/opinion/sharon-pardo/shabbat-dinner-in-a-former-danish-church

Copenhagen Shabbat Dinner in a Former Church – The Jewish Star, 9/9/2026. https://www.thejewishstar.com/stories/copenhagen-shabbat-dinner-in-a-former-church,26839

On Friday night in Copenhagen, I went to Shabbat dinner. Nobody else there knew that's what it was.

There were no candles, no Kiddush, no challah. Instead, I found myself at Folkehuset Absalon, a community house created inside a former church by Danish Jewish entrepreneur Lennart Lajboschitz, the founder of Flying Tiger Copenhagen. There was already something unusual about a Jewish Israeli spending Friday night over dinner in a former Christian sanctuary.

Absalon is built around a remarkably simple idea. Bring strangers into the same room. Feed them. Give them a reason to talk.

Every day, tourists sit beside Copenhageners, young visitors beside pensioners, friends beside those they have never met. Large dishes are passed around. You do not choose everyone around you. If something you want is beyond your reach, you have to ask someone else to pass it.

It sounds almost embarrassingly simple. It also felt strangely familiar.

Around me were tourists from India, the Netherlands and Slovenia, as well as a group of Danish pensioners. Questions moved around the room together with the serving dishes. Where are you from? Why are you in Copenhagen? Where have you traveled? What do you do?

Eventually, someone asked where I came from. Israel, I said.

And almost nothing happened. The young tourists could not have cared less. There was no dramatic pause and no sudden transformation of our conversation

into a seminar on the Middle East. They wanted to talk about travel, cities, work and one another.

I was an Israeli having dinner, not Israel having dinner. That distinction has become more important than we sometimes realize.

We live in an age in which identity often arrives before the individual. Nationality, religion, generation and politics become shorthand for deciding who someone is before we have learned much about them.

Social media has made the process brutally efficient. We sort strangers before meeting them and increasingly encounter the world through categories that tell us whom to admire, distrust or blame.

Sitting with strangers works differently. You meet the individual before constructing the category.

The Danish pensioners provided a useful reminder that proximity does not necessarily produce harmony. They were far less welcoming than the tourists and strikingly hostile toward the United States. Their politics entered the conversation quickly. They were entitled to their opinions, of course, just as I was entitled to disagree. But that was precisely what made the encounter interesting.

The point is not to manufacture agreement. Conversation does not dissolve political differences or magically produce common values. The achievement is considerably more modest and perhaps more important. Those who disagree remain seated beside one another.

Jews know something about that.

For thousands of years, the Jewish table has been far more than a place where we consume food. On Friday night, time itself is reorganized around it. We bless wine and bread. We talk, argue, tell stories and invite others into our homes. For a few hours, an ordinary domestic space becomes a community.

The Passover seder makes the connection still clearer. One of Judaism's most important rituals is constructed around memory, questions, conversation and eating. We do not merely recount the Exodus. We do so collectively, asking questions as the story unfolds. Jewish tradition understood long before modern social science that ideas are transmitted differently when embedded in ritual and human interaction.

Perhaps that is why Absalon felt so familiar.

Lajboschitz did not create a synagogue, and those around me had not come to observe Shabbat. Yet the impulse behind it was recognizably Jewish. Community does not simply happen. It requires rituals and spaces that make encounters possible.

Modern cities are very good at allowing us to avoid one another. We can live in the same building without knowing our neighbors, travel on the same train without exchanging a word and sit in a restaurant speaking only to those with whom we arrived. Technology has made isolation even more convenient. Food reaches our door without conversation. Entertainment is individually selected. Political opinions are delivered by algorithms that increasingly know which views will keep us comfortable or angry.

Absalon disrupts that convenience by doing something almost primitive. It makes strangers sit together.

There is something worth considering here for Israelis and Europeans as well. The encounter between Israelis and Europeans has become intensely political. We speak about governments, institutions, wars, diplomatic disagreements, trade, universities, boycotts and foreign policy. These debates matter. But they can create the illusion that relations between societies exist only at the level of politics. They do not.

Europe is also millions of ordinary encounters. Israelis studying at European universities, Europeans visiting Tel Aviv, researchers working together, tourists sharing railway compartments, businesspeople meeting colleagues, and, occasionally, an Israeli finding himself among Indians, Dutch, Slovenians and Danes in Copenhagen.

None of this erases disagreement. Nor should it. What it does is restore proportion.

The young tourists did not need to agree with Israeli government policy to speak with an Israeli. The Danish pensioners did not need to abandon their hostility toward America for the conversation to continue. Nobody had to issue a declaration of shared values before asking for another serving.

That sounds trivial until one considers how much of contemporary politics is devoted to doing precisely the opposite.

We increasingly demand political agreement as the price of social legitimacy. We withdraw from conversations, institutions and sometimes even relationships because those on the other side hold views we dislike. The result is not a world with less disagreement. It is a world in which disagreement increasingly occurs among groups that rarely encounter one another.

Judaism offers a more demanding model. Anyone who has attended a large Jewish family dinner knows that consensus is hardly a prerequisite for breaking bread. Argument does not mean something has gone wrong. Sometimes, it is evidence that the relationship is alive. The challenge is to disagree without destroying the bonds that make disagreement possible.

Perhaps the setting at Absalon mattered, too. A building once devoted to one form of religious community has been transformed into a space for another kind of human encounter. On a Friday night, inside a former church, visitors from different countries and generations, and presumably different faiths or no faith at all, sat under the same roof. Nobody asked what anyone believed. It didn't matter. The ritual was simply eating together.

I found myself thinking about the Jewish idea of tikkun olam, "repairing the world." We often use the expression for enormous ambitions. Fighting injustice. Protecting the vulnerable. Improving society. These are worthy goals. Yet repairing the world may also require repairing some of its smallest institutions. The table is one of them.

My accidental Shabbat did not solve anything. Nobody left Absalon with a new theory of international relations. I doubt the Danish pensioners reconsidered their views of America, and I certainly did not reconsider mine because of them. Perhaps that is asking too much.

What Absalon offered was something smaller. Nationality did not disappear. Politics did not disappear. Neither did disagreement. But none of them determined who was allowed to remain in the conversation.

And when something was beyond our reach, we still had to ask a stranger to pass it. In a world becoming remarkably skilled at keeping us apart, that may be a modest form of repair.

ESSAY 42

The Europe Worth Defending

The Jerusalem Post Printed Edition, 1/10/2026, page 9.

What a Vienna Restaurant Revealed About Jewish Life in Europe – Opinion – The Jerusalem Post, 1/10/2026. https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-910174

On the eve of Rosh Hashanah, I found myself in a Vienna restaurant with an Israeli friend.

We were not in Leopoldstadt, home to much of the city's contemporary Jewish communal life, nor in one of the familiar places where Jewish visitors expect to find a recognizable communal presence.

This was a different Vienna: a lively, fashionable neighborhood, unmistakably progressive in its cultural instincts. Rainbow flags and signs of LGBTQ visibility appeared everywhere. Around us, conversations flowed easily between languages and professions.

At the next table sat an Austrian couple and their guest, a professor from a small university in the United States. He teaches Austrian studies and European history and is spending the academic year in Europe.

It was impossible not to overhear fragments of their conversation. They had wanted to reserve a table at a Jewish restaurant for Rosh Hashanah, but had failed to find a place. They spoke with mild disappointment, as one might about a fully booked concert or a restaurant that had suddenly become popular.

Then the conversation moved on. The American professor wondered aloud whether his students must be exceptionally wealthy.

The subject shifted to rents and property prices in Vienna. He was looking for an apartment, he explained, because he needed to escape US President Donald Trump's America for a while.

There was no dramatic revelation or ideological declaration. Just three people having dinner on an autumn evening, discussing university life, real estate, and the political anxiety of an American visitor.

Yet I could not stop thinking about the brief opening exchange. No one at that table was Jewish. So far as I could tell, none had an immediate connection to the Jewish community.

Israel did not enter the conversation. Gaza did not enter it. Antisemitism did not enter it. They wanted to dine in a Jewish restaurant because it was Rosh Hashanah.

At that moment, Judaism was neither a provocation nor a political demand. It was simply part of the city around them.

For an Israeli, this can feel almost startling.

How Jewish life changed after October 7

Since October 7, Jewishness has too often entered public life with a question mark attached. Jews are asked to explain Israel, condemn its government, prove their political credentials, or account for events beyond their control. Across Europe, Jewish visibility has become more guarded.

None of this can be wished away. Europe is not free of antisemitism, and Austria has no right to forget the particular weight of its history. Vienna was once one of the greatest centers of European Jewish creativity.

It was also a city deeply implicated in the catastrophe that destroyed so much of that world. Commemoration matters, but neither memorials nor museums can by themselves guarantee a secure Jewish future.

Nor should one restaurant conversation be turned into evidence that everything is well. It would be absurd to derive a theory of European Jewish life from a failed dinner reservation. The point is smaller – and perhaps more revealing.

There are forms of belonging that become visible precisely because no one makes a ceremony of them. The Austrian couple and their American friend did not present themselves as allies. They did not make a statement about tolerance.

They did not speak in the language of remembrance, solidarity, or historical responsibility. They simply assumed that a Jewish restaurant on Rosh Hashanah belonged naturally among the possibilities offered by their city.

That assumption matters.

It suggests that Jewish life can be understood not only through the language of threat, trauma, and protection, important as all three are, but also through familiarity.

A Jewish holiday can be known without being exotic. Jewish food can be sought without becoming a spectacle.

Jewish presence can form part of the ordinary cultural map of a European capital, no more perplexing than a university seminar, an American election, or the search for an affordable apartment.

The word "ordinary" can sound inadequate after the history Jews have lived through in Europe. But perhaps it is among the most ambitious words available.

To be ordinary is not to be invisible, nor does it mean abandoning identity or forgetting the past. It means being able to appear in public without every appearance becoming a test.

A holiday can be noticed without becoming a debate; Jewish life need not always be reduced to a security problem, a moral accusation, or a political symbol.

There is something worth noticing, too, in the setting itself. The neighborhood was not marked by nostalgia for an imagined old Europe. It was contemporary, urban, and progressive. Its public language was one of pluralism, personal freedom, and sexual diversity.

But that evening, Judaism was not made contingent on Israel. It was not required to locate itself on one side or another of a political divide. No political examination was required. For a few unremarkable minutes, it existed on its own terms.

A table beside ours in Vienna offered no grand lesson and no reassuring slogan.

It offered something more fragile: a moment in which Rosh Hashanah was acknowledged without argument, Judaism was present without explanation, and Jewish life was woven into the ordinary fabric of a European evening.

That is not the whole story of Europe. But it is part of the Europe worth defending.

ESSAY 43

The Question Only a Jewish Minister Gets Asked

The Times of Israel, 15/9/2026. https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/the-question-only-a-jewish-minister-gets-asked/

Ed Miliband announced sanctions against Israeli settlements in the House of Commons. By the next morning, Britain was debating how often he goes to synagogue.

Sir Ephraim Mirvis, Britain's chief rabbi, called the measures a dark day for British Jews and warned that they could embolden those who wish Jews harm. On BBC Radio 4, Justin Webb asked Miliband what he would say to British Jews going to synagogue for Rosh Hashanah, feeling less safe. Then came a question that could have been put only to a Jewish foreign secretary: "Are you going?"

Miliband said that he does not attend synagogue. Webb implied that this was the point: perhaps the Chief Rabbi's warning meant less to a minister outside congregational life.

The concern behind the question was legitimate. British Jews may bear the consequences of policy towards Israel for which they have no responsibility, especially visibly Jewish people and congregations already worried about security. But that is a question for any foreign secretary. "Are you going?" changed the subject. It moved the argument from Miliband's judgment to the kind of Jew he is.

Miliband had put Jewish identity at the center of his case himself. He spoke as a proud British Jew, recalled his family's experience of Nazi persecution, and described his attachment to Israel. Biography may explain that attachment. It confers no greater authority on his Israel policy than absence from synagogue removes. Webb's question was the mirror image of Miliband's opening: one offered Jewishness as a credential, the other asked to inspect it.

It did Mirvis no favors either. His warning was political, not pastoral. Would action against Israeli settlements encourage those who already hold British

Jews responsible for Israel's conduct? Miliband answered a related but distinct question: anyone who blames British Jews for an Israeli government's actions, he said, is engaging in antisemitism.

Both propositions can be true. Jews bear no responsibility for Israeli government decisions, and antisemites may hold them responsible anyway. A government cannot protect Jews simply by exposing the irrationality of those who threaten them. Nor can a warning about antisemitic consequences, by itself, determine British policy towards Israel.

That policy is substantial. Britain will ban imports from West Bank settlements, sanction companies and individuals involved in settlement expansion, prohibit the advertising of settlement property in Britain, and refuse export licenses for goods that materially contribute to an occupation it now regards as unlawful. Israel closed the British consulate in Jerusalem.

The package can be contested. Synagogue attendance cannot decide it.

The Board of Deputies and the Jewish Leadership Council joined Mirvis in opposing the measures. Jonathan Wittenberg, senior rabbi of Masorti Judaism, backed them after visiting Umm al Khair, a West Bank village beset by settlers. Progressive Judaism urged communal leaders to make the range of Jewish opinion visible.

Europe has had this argument before. Bruno Kreisky, born into an assimilated Jewish family in Vienna, escaped Nazi persecution into Swedish exile and became Austria's foreign minister and then its chancellor. He was one of Europe's most conspicuous critics of Israeli policy.

Kreisky championed Palestinian national rights, cultivated Arab leaders, and helped give the Palestinian question a place in European diplomacy. The PLO opened an office in Vienna in 1978, and Austria formalized relations in 1980. During the 1973 hostage crisis, Golda Meir flew to Vienna to change his position on closing the Schönau transit camp and failed.

His stance reflected Austrian neutrality, European social democracy, and a belief that a small neutral state could open channels between antagonists. It also provoked a political loyalty test. Austria's conservative People's Party had questioned whether he was Austrian enough. In Israel, especially in Begin's eyes,

he was a self-hating Jew. One side doubted his Austrian loyalty, the other his Jewish loyalty.

Kreisky's abuse of Simon Wiesenthal was disgraceful. After Wiesenthal showed that Freedom Party leader Friedrich Peter had served in an SS unit implicated in murdering Jews, Kreisky accused the Holocaust survivor of mafia methods and collaboration with the Gestapo. After renewed attacks, a court convicted him of defamation in 1989.

That record deserves condemnation for what Kreisky said and did. His Middle East policy deserves to be judged on its assumptions, consequences, and political wisdom. Dismissing either as an expression of Jewish self-hatred evades the harder task of deciding where Kreisky was right and where he was wrong.

The same discipline is needed now. Opponents of Miliband's sanctions can argue that they will not change Israeli policy, will harden Israeli opinion, weaken Britain's influence, and prove difficult to distinguish from wider economic action against Israel. Mirvis's fear that they will deepen Jewish insecurity also deserves evidence and attention.

Supporters can answer that repeated British criticism failed to restrain settlement growth; that targeted sanctions distinguish between Israel and settlements; and that, with E1 advancing, support for a two-state outcome becomes meaningless unless governments attach consequences to policies that make Palestinian territorial continuity impossible.

What divides the two camps is a judgment about which policy will best protect Israeli security, Palestinian rights, Jewish safety, and the possibility of peace. Affection for Israel can be found on both sides.

Miliband may have judged wrongly. His measures may prove ineffective, disproportionate, or counterproductive. That is the ground on which to challenge them. Jewish ancestry gives him no special authority to criticize Israel and creates no special duty to defend the Israeli government.

The same discipline protects his critics. Mirvis does not forfeit an independent political judgment because his position coincides with Israel's government. British Jews who fear that sanctions will encourage antisemitism should no

more be dismissed as proxies for Jerusalem than Jewish supporters of sanctions should be treated as deserters from it.

Turning a disagreement over Israel into a story about Jewish loyalty assigns diaspora Jews a political role they did not choose. When they defend the Israeli government, they are suspected of divided allegiance; when they criticize it, they are asked whether they have betrayed an inherited obligation. Either way, their standing as citizens is made conditional.

Israel has little to gain from this arrangement. It should be able to keep friends who disagree with its government. Diaspora Jews should be able to defend Israel against antisemitism, affirm its right to security and national self-determination, and still oppose policies they believe endanger those very things.

Mirvis's warning belongs in the argument. It cannot end it. A government contemplating sanctions must weigh their effect on Jewish safety, Israeli politics, Palestinian lives, and the prospects for peace. But to let the threat of an antisemitic reaction rule out action against Israeli policy would hand those prepared to threaten Jews a veto over British foreign policy.

Miliband owes the British public a defense of his measures: what they are meant to achieve, why these instruments were chosen, what costs they will impose, and how success will be measured. His critics should hold him to that standard.

Jewish identity may explain why this argument feels so personal. It cannot supply the answer.

Webb's first question, what a foreign secretary says to British Jews who feel less safe, deserves the fullest answer a government can give.

The second deserves none.

ESSAY 44

Rethinking Jewish Diplomacy

Jerusalem News Syndicate (JNS), 16/9/2026.
https://www.jns.org/opinion/sharon-pardo/rethinking-jewish-diplomacy?utm_source=whatsapp&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=article_share

A curious story from Hungary recently caught my attention. Bence Szabó, a two-time Olympic fencing champion, said that after a long career in international sport, he joined the Sports Diplomacy Department of Hungary's foreign ministry to serve as the country's ambassador to Cuba. The appointment never happened, and the foreign ministry has not confirmed all the details of his account.

The interesting part is what Hungary apparently saw in Szabó. A lifetime in sports had given him international networks, access, experience and recognition that could be converted into diplomatic capital. There was never any question whom he would represent. He would represent Hungary.

For the Jewish world, that clarity does not exist.

Israeli athletes can and do represent Israel. But millions of Jews live elsewhere, compete for other countries and belong to Jewish institutions whose relationship with Israel may be important without making them representatives of the Israeli state.

The moment we speak of "Jewish diplomacy," therefore, a familiar question arises: Where does Jewish solidarity end and dual loyalty begin?

The premise of that question needs to be challenged immediately. A Jew does not acquire a second political allegiance simply by caring about other Jews or about Israel. Transnational Jewish belonging is not dual loyalty, just as belonging to a transnational religious, cultural or ethnic community does not cancel citizenship or national allegiance.

Since October 7, however, the distinction has become harder to maintain in practice. Jews across the world have found themselves asked to explain, defend or condemn the actions of a government they did not elect and a state of which

many are not citizens. Connection to Israel is too easily interpreted as political representation, and Jewish solidarity as evidence of political allegiance.

That is precisely why the Jewish world may need more diplomacy, not less.

I do not mean diplomacy on behalf of an imagined Jewish government, nor an alternative foreign ministry or a network designed to defend every decision made in Jerusalem. Jewish diplomacy should mean something different: Jewish institutions should build and maintain relationships with the societies in which Jews live and with one another across borders.

Sports may be one of the best places to begin.

The Jewish world already possesses a remarkable sporting infrastructure. Maccabi World Union reaches hundreds of thousands of people in more than 70 countries through clubs, community centers, regional competitions and the Maccabiah Games. Beyond Maccabi, Jewish athletes, coaches, referees and sports executives participate in national federations, Olympic committees, professional clubs and international sporting bodies.

For more than a century, these networks have connected Jews with one another. They can also connect Jewish communities with the societies around them. But representation matters.

Imagine a Maccabi athlete in Europe who, after a competition, is asked whether Israel should be allowed to participate in international sports while the war in Gaza continues. The Maccabi badge identifies her with a Jewish organization closely connected to Israel. She may personally care deeply about Israel, but she does not represent its government.

A Spanish Jew can be loyal to Spain and deeply connected to Jews in Israel. A German Jew can compete for Germany while belonging to Maccabi. A British Jewish athlete can care about Israel without representing Israel.

Jewish diplomacy, therefore, requires knowing who is speaking and for whom. A Maccabi representative can speak for Maccabi. Someone participating in an initiative of a local Jewish community can represent that community. An Israeli athlete formally sent abroad on Israel's behalf represents Israel. None automatically speaks for the others.

Why call this diplomacy rather than simply goodwill? Because goodwill describes an effect. Diplomacy describes an organized relationship pursued for a purpose.

Two athletes becoming friends is not sports diplomacy. But when a Jewish organization deliberately uses sports to create sustained relationships with other institutions and communities, to communicate who it is, build access and maintain channels across social or political boundaries, something more organized is taking place.

There is nothing new about this. Modern Jewish sports organizations were never concerned only with winning competitions. From Max Nordau's call for "muscular Judaism" to the emergence of Maccabi and the first Maccabiah Games in 1932, sports also provided a means of expressing Jewish identity, confidence and collective agency.

Hungary itself was part of that history. VAC, the Jewish Fencing and Athletic Club, was established in Budapest in 1906. Its athletes participated in Hungarian sporting life until antisemitic persecution made that impossible. Many of its members were murdered during the Holocaust. The club was later reestablished.

The challenge today is different. Jews no longer need sports to demonstrate that they can fence, swim, run or win Olympic medals. Jewish communities increasingly need durable relationships with the societies in which they live.

Too often, Jewish public activity begins only after something has gone wrong. An antisemitic incident occurs, and Jewish organizations respond. A controversy involving Israel erupts, and Jewish leaders are asked for a reaction. A Jewish institution is threatened, and community representatives seek allies.

Sports can create relationships before they are needed.

That does not mean turning athletes into spokespeople or handing them talking points about Israel. Jewish institutions should begin with something much simpler: map the relationships they already have.

Which members of a Jewish community hold positions in sports federations, coach teams, run clubs or compete internationally? Which Maccabi members have built meaningful relationships outside the Jewish community? Who already

knows the people running national federations, Olympic committees and local clubs?

A coach who has worked with a club for 10 years does not have to introduce himself when a problem arises. A community whose young people regularly compete with their neighbors is not meeting those neighbors for the first time after an antisemitic incident. An official who has spent years inside a national federation already knows whom to approach and how that institution works.

There is a danger here. If Jewish organizations draw on these networks primarily when Israel faces criticism, they may reinforce exactly the assumption they seek to resist – that Jewish institutions abroad are extensions of the Israeli state.

That risk cannot simply be dismissed as prejudice. Jewish institutions themselves must maintain clear boundaries. Jewish identity is not Israeli citizenship. Connection to Israel is not representation of its government. Jewish solidarity is not dual loyalty. And a Jewish athlete should always be free to say the most important sentence in diplomacy: I do not represent them.

That brings us back to Szabó. Hungary understood that relationships built through sports can become diplomatic assets. The Jewish world should recognize the same potential without pretending to possess a single government, foreign policy or political voice.

After October 7, perhaps the question is no longer whether the Jewish world needs diplomacy, but what kind of diplomacy it needs.

Jewish diplomacy does not need an embassy. It needs institutions willing to identify, cultivate and use the relationships Jews have already built. Sports offers one of the largest existing networks on which to build.

ESSAY 45

Europe Remembers Its Murdered Jews, but Does It Listen to Living Ones?

The Jerusalem Post, 20/10/2026, https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-912266
The Stones of Kaunas – The Jerusalem Post Printed Edition, 21/10/2026, page 10.

The gates are gone. So are most of the people who once passed through them. On a quiet street in Kaunas, Lithuania, a small memorial marks the entrance to the Jewish ghetto established here in 1941.

Behind it stands a residential building, its walls covered in colorful geometric patterns. Someone has left a few stones at the foot of the memorial. People live here now. They come home from work, carry their shopping upstairs, and go about their lives. I wonder how often they stop to think about what happened on this street.

Before the Holocaust, Kaunas was home to some 37,000 Jews. By August 1941, nearly 30,000 had been forced into the ghetto. Most were murdered by the Nazis and their Lithuanian collaborators. Only a few thousand survived.

Later this month, Kaunas will mark 85 years since the Great Action of October 28-29, 1941, when some 9,200 Jews, including 4,273 children, were selected and then murdered at the Ninth Fort.

I have visited many Holocaust memorials over the years. Yet standing before this modest marker, I found myself thinking less about the past than about the present.

Europe has invested enormous effort in remembering its murdered Jews. Museums, memorials, and Holocaust education have become part of European public life. All of this matters deeply. But why does a continent so committed to remembering dead Jews sometimes struggle to listen to living ones?

The dead make no political demands. They do not criticize European governments or challenge European Union (EU) institutions. Living Jews do. So do Israelis, whose relationship with Europe has always involved disagreement, disappointment, and sometimes genuine affection.

European Jews and Israelis are not the same community. European Jews should never have to defend an Israeli government or answer for its decisions. Yet both encounter, in different ways, a Europe that sometimes seems more comfortable with Jewish history than with Jewish voices today.

For European Jews, this is painfully real. A 2024 survey by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights found that, at least occasionally, 76% of Jewish respondents concealed their Jewish identity, while 75% felt that people in their country blamed them for the Israeli government's actions because they were Jewish. The survey was conducted before October 7, 2023.

Think about what those numbers mean. Everyday choices become questions of personal safety. These concerns accompanied me to the annual conference of the European Association of Israel Studies, held in Kaunas this month.

The conference offered something increasingly precious: people willing to listen to arguments they might strongly oppose. Scholars discussed Israeli democracy, Palestine, antisemitism, Holocaust memory, and Israel's relationship with Europe.

Arab citizens of Israel were among the presenters. A researcher from the University of Haifa examined restrictions on spatial planning in Israel following October 7. Others addressed Jewish-Arab relations, academic boycotts, and the challenges of teaching Israel in European classrooms.

I did not agree with everything I heard. But agreement was never the point.

Yet elsewhere in Europe, the channels for such exchanges are narrowing. In June 2025, Erasmus University Rotterdam froze institutional cooperation with Bar-Ilan University, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and the University of Haifa after an independent committee warned of risks of complicity in human rights violations. Student exchanges were suspended, and new institutional research collaborations halted.

Universities have a responsibility to examine their partnerships, particularly during a war that has caused such terrible suffering in Gaza. Those moral questions are real and cannot simply be brushed aside. But making academic contact harder does not make difficult political questions easier to answer.

The University of Haifa is among the institutions affected by Rotterdam's decision. One of its researchers, an Arab citizen of Israel, could still present his work in Kaunas. But what of the students who might have studied abroad, the young researchers who could have worked together, and the conversations lost when institutional connections are severed?

Some of those missing conversations might have challenged Israeli government policies more forcefully than anything said from a distance.

Blaming European Jews for Israel's actions and questioning partnerships with Israeli universities are not the same thing. But neither should mean treating people as proxies for a government. Europe does not become more principled by narrowing academic exchange. It becomes less equipped to understand a society whose decisions affect Israelis, Palestinians, and Europeans alike.

Another encounter in Kaunas captured the complexity of Europe's relationship with its Jews. Lea Goldberg, one of the great poets of modern Hebrew literature, looks down from a mural. She grew up in Kaunas before immigrating to Palestine in 1935.

Beside her portrait appears her poem "Pine," in Hebrew and Lithuanian. It speaks of two landscapes, two places that feel like home, and the difficulty of belonging entirely to either.

Goldberg's memories of Lithuania were complicated. In 1919, as her family returned from wartime displacement, her father was detained and severely mistreated. He never fully recovered.

I was glad Kaunas remembered her. But I wondered how she might have felt about being celebrated in a place that had given her both a childhood and painful memories.

The ghetto memorial and Goldberg's portrait tell different stories. One recalls a Jewish world that was destroyed. The other reminds us that Jewish life continued elsewhere, including in Israel. Neither story is simple. Neither should be.

Civil discussions with people of different views

Our hosts at Vytautas Magnus University welcomed us warmly. We could criticize Israeli government policies, discuss Palestinian suffering, disagree about history, and still sit together over coffee. Nobody needed to pretend our disagreements were small.

After years of attending academic conferences, I never expected to feel grateful simply because people with different views could sit in the same room and talk. In Kaunas, I did.

At the ghetto memorial, I thought again about the families who once lived in these streets. They were Europeans. They went to school, fell in love, and made plans for the future. Some probably wanted to leave. Others could not imagine living anywhere else. They did not know they would one day be remembered primarily for how they died.

Jewish life in Europe was never only a story of loss, and it is not one today. Israel cannot replace the Jewish Europe that disappeared. Nor should European Jews be treated as representatives of Israel. Both deserve to be encountered as people, not as symbols in arguments others have already settled.

I am grateful for Europe's memorials, museums, and ceremonies. I want future generations to visit them – and to understand that the people we remember were once living Europeans, with opinions, fears, ambitions, and disagreements of their own.

The stones at the Kaunas memorial honor people who can no longer speak. Listening to those who can would be another way of honoring their memory.

ESSAY 46

Hungary: Still a Friend, No Longer a Veto

The Times of Israel, 22/10/2026, https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/hungary-still-a-friend-no-longer-a-veto/

Seventy years ago, on October 23, 1956, students took to the streets of Budapest. Workers joined them, then families, and thousands of Hungarians who had grown tired of being told what to think and how to live. They wanted Soviet troops out of their country. They wanted to speak freely and decide their own future. For a few extraordinary days, they believed they might succeed. Then the Soviet tanks returned.

Hungary is commemorating that revolution at an unusual moment in its history. Six months ago, Hungarians voted to end Viktor Orbán's sixteen years in power. On October 27, Israelis will elect their own parliament. And earlier this week, President Isaac Herzog visited Budapest, where a new government is turning back toward Europe.

Herzog himself drew attention to the anniversary. Speaking alongside Hungarian President András Baka, he recalled the courage of those who challenged Soviet rule. He also thanked Hungary for helping Israel maintain constructive relations with the European Union (EU).

That second remark deserves a closer look.

For years, Hungary was the country Israel could count on when things became difficult in Brussels. As criticism of Israeli policies grew, Orbán repeatedly came to Jerusalem's defense. He and Benjamin Netanyahu enjoyed a close political friendship, and that friendship gave Israel something increasingly valuable: a European leader willing to stand in the way when others wanted to act against it. More precisely, Hungary had a veto.

Many EU foreign policy sanctions require the agreement of every member state. If one country objects, the measure cannot pass. Orbán understood how

much influence that gave him, and he was not afraid to use it. When European governments discussed sanctions involving Israel, officials in Jerusalem had good reason to watch Budapest.

Then, on April 12, Hungarians voted for someone else. Péter Magyar's Tisza party won a decisive victory. Orbán was out, and the new prime minister made repairing Hungary's relations with Brussels a priority. Years of disputes over judicial independence, democratic standards, and European funding had taken their toll. Magyar wanted Hungary to have a stronger voice in Europe rather than remain isolated within it.

The consequences became clear within weeks. On May 11, the EU approved sanctions against violent Israeli settlers and settler organizations after Hungary lifted the veto maintained under Orbán. The sanctions had previously been blocked. Now they could go forward. Israel had grown accustomed to Hungary providing protection when European governments considered measures it opposed. One election in Budapest had changed that arrangement.

Yet Magyar has been careful not to turn Hungary's political transition into a break with Israel. During Herzog's stay, Magyar accepted an invitation to Israel. His government has spoken of maintaining close ties and emphasized its commitment to combating antisemitism. Hungary still wants Israel as a friend. It is simply less inclined to defend every Israeli position in Brussels.

In May, Hungary also reversed Orbán's decision to withdraw from the International Criminal Court (ICC), which had issued an arrest warrant for Netanyahu. Budapest was making clear that its friendship with Israel would no longer determine its stance in international institutions.

For Israel, Orbán's support had been useful, sometimes enormously so. But it also encouraged a habit of looking for the European government that would block an unwelcome decision rather than dealing with the disagreements themselves. That approach could deliver a diplomatic victory on a particular day. It could not repair Israel's wider relations with Europe.

Prague may now become the next Budapest. Under Prime Minister Andrej Babiš, Czechia has opposed aspects of the EU's proposed measures against Israel. But what happens when that government changes, too? Governments lose elections.

Building a strategy around one ally leaves a country exposed when that ally is gone.

And a friendly government cannot block everything. EU foreign policy sanctions generally require unanimity, but other decisions follow different rules. In September 2025, the European Commission proposed suspending certain trade provisions of the EU-Israel Association Agreement. That measure requires a qualified majority rather than unanimity. It remains pending and has not secured sufficient support. Hungary's veto was never Israel's only safeguard, and it was never enough.

The Hungarian and Israeli elections are not quite alike. Hungary's place in Europe was part of the political debate that brought Magyar to power. Israelis are heading to the polls with other concerns foremost in their minds: security, Iran, the consequences of October 7, and accountability for what followed. Europe is unlikely to decide their vote. But it will still be there the morning after.

Whoever forms Israel's next government will inherit the same difficult conversations about Gaza, settlements, Palestinian statehood, and international law. European leaders will continue raising questions that many Israelis consider unfair or biased. Israel, for its part, faces security threats many Europeans struggle to grasp. Neither side can expect the other simply to change its mind.

In 1957, as the Treaties of Rome were signed, Shimon Peres, acting on behalf of David Ben-Gurion, met Jean Monnet to explore the possibility of Israeli membership in the emerging European Economic Community. When I researched that meeting, what struck me was how early Israel's leaders understood that Europe's future would have a direct bearing on their own.

They were right. Europe is now Israel's largest trading partner. Israeli scientists work with colleagues across the continent through "Horizon Europe," although the Commission's July 2025 proposal to restrict Israeli participation in part of the research programme shows how vulnerable those connections have become. Agreements signed by politicians matter less here than the people who have learned to trust one another, often despite their governments. Losing those ties would be far easier than rebuilding them.

Europe has responsibilities, too. The threats from Iran and its regional allies are serious. Herzog's appeal in Budapest for greater international cooperation against them was a reminder that Israel needs partners willing to work with it, not merely governments that block proposals in Brussels. European leaders cannot expect Israel to listen to their concerns if they show little interest in understanding Israel's own.

There will always be disagreements. Some are profound, and no amount of goodwill will make them disappear. But a relationship built over decades should be able to withstand difficult conversations without putting everything else at risk.

Whoever governs Israel after October 27 will have to decide how to approach Europe. It can keep searching for sympathetic leaders who will occasionally rescue it from an unwelcome decision. Or it can put time and effort into repairing ties that have been allowed to deteriorate.

Elections determine who governs. What happens to a country's friendships afterward depends on what those governments choose to do.



PART III

Israel, the Jewish People, and the Wider World

ESSAY 47

Bondi Massacre Was Not About Free Speech – It's the Cost of Normalizing Antisemitism

The Jerusalem Post, 21/12/2025. https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-880901

The Hanukkah attack in Sydney was a terrorist act driven by antisemitism. It should force democracies to confront how years of indulging antisemitic intimidation have blurred the line between political criticism and targeted menace. Protecting vigorous debate about Gaza is essential. But so is restoring a moral and institutional clarity that condemns harassment, dehumanization, and the laundering of violence as "speech." The failure to do so, the laxity, has made real-world attacks commonplace.

Start with the obvious, because it has been avoided. Jews celebrating a religious holiday were targeted not only to kill, but to broadcast fear. Terrorism aims far beyond its immediate victims. It signals to a minority that public presence carries danger.

Yet, almost immediately, the attack was reframed as a threat to free speech. Any strong reaction, we were told, would be used to silence criticism of Israel's war in Gaza. This sounds like a defense of liberal values, but it functions as a diversion. It shifts attention away from what has been happening since October 7: not an expansion of democratic debate, but the normalization of antisemitic intimidation under the cover of political passion.

Criticism of Israel is legitimate and necessary. Democracies must allow sharp, even unsettling arguments. But over the past two years, political language has repeatedly been used to erase distinctions liberal societies depend on: between arguing about policies and menacing people; between condemning a state and treating Jews everywhere as its proxies; between protest that seeks persuasion and intimidation that seeks retreat.

Context: The line between criticism of Israel and antisemitism

The erosion of these distinctions has been reframed as moral sophistication. Universities invoke "context," while Jewish students learn to conceal their symbols – and themselves. Civic leaders praise "passionate engagement" while Jewish institutions quietly increase security. Jewish fear is treated not as a social fact, but as a political machination.

Free speech protects criticism of states, including Israel, but it does not require moral abdication. It does not oblige institutions to treat intimidation as debate or to dignify the glorification of civilian slaughter as political expression. A society that cannot distinguish between critique and coercion is not pluralistic. It is evasive.

The difference is not complex. Speech aimed at policy belongs in democratic argument. Speech aimed at driving a minority out of public life is social coercion. Speech that seeks persuasion belongs in debate. Speech that seeks to intimidate or dehumanize is unacceptable, even when it borrows from the language of politics.

When institutions refuse to draw these lines, they shield impunity. And impunity teaches. It teaches that antisemitism, if packaged as activism, will be tolerated until someone else pays the price.

Sydney is a reminder that the price is not abstract. Terrorism does not emerge in a vacuum. It is nourished by atmospheres. When dehumanizing rhetoric becomes routine and violent fantasies are excused as resistance, the barrier between saying and doing weakens. Not every ugly chant leads to violence. But tolerating them blurs the moral boundary that makes violence harder to justify.

The real danger is not that democracies will suddenly overreact. It is that they have underreacted for too long. The correction needed is not one of censorship, but of clarity. One can advocate fiercely for Palestinians without endorsing violence. One can condemn Israeli policy without transferring that condemnation onto Jews at home. Protest remains compatible with pluralism only when it does not make minority participation unsafe.

Sydney should not be used to shut down legitimate criticism of Israel. But it should end the pretense that antisemitic intimidation, when cloaked in politics, deserves a pass. Democracies that want both robust debate and public safety must protect argument, confront intimidation, and stop pretending the line between the two cannot be drawn.

ESSAY 48

Missing at Davos: World Economic Forum Agenda Should Have Covered Antisemitism

The Jerusalem Post, 21/1/2026. https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-884074

The World Economic Forum gathers this week in Davos, at a moment of extraordinary geopolitical and technological flux. The annual meeting, nestled in the Swiss Alps, attracts presidents, prime ministers, chief executives, decision-makers, and opinion leaders who shape the global agenda for finance, trade, and innovation.

The official themes predictably revolve around pressing economic issues. These include the escalating trade dispute between the US and Europe after US President Donald Trump announced new tariffs on those European states that objected to his proposed Greenland takeover, as well as concerns about AI, energy markets, and the trajectory of the global economy.

It is no surprise that a large portion of the agenda is reserved for geopolitical discussions. Davos has become a diplomatic arena where governments seek to signal priorities and manage rivalries.

Absent from this crowded agenda, however, is a topic that deserves urgent global attention – antisemitism.

Why is antisemitism not on the WEF agenda?

The sharp rise in antisemitic rhetoric and violence around the world intensified after Hamas's terrorist attacks in Israel on October 7, 2023, and has spread with the viral ease of a cultural pandemic.

It manifests in shooting incidents, physical assaults on streets and campuses, open intimidation on social media, and in conspiratorial narratives that circulate through politics and entertainment landscapes.

Given the presence of global leaders and the stated ambition of Davos to address global risks, one might expect a serious discussion on how to confront this ancient hatred now retooled for the AI age.

A responsible global forum could use its convening power to articulate a set of norms for combating antisemitism, and to call for a coordinated governmental and educational response. It could highlight successful national programs that track hate crimes, encourage digital platforms to enforce consistent community standards, and promote historical literacy, so that societies understand what unchecked antisemitism has produced in the past.

Davos excels at generating frameworks, task forces, and pledges. A pledge to counter antisemitism would fit easily within its repertoire if there were the will to pursue it.

The omission of this subject says something uncomfortable about the priorities of global leadership. The forum remains fascinated by the contributions of Jewish scientists, researchers, entrepreneurs, and investors, but is much less eager to defend Jewish communities against persecution.

Antisemitism is treated as a parochial concern rather than a civilizational threat, despite its proven ability to destabilize societies, fracture democracies, and normalize bigotry. That indifference carries a price. Hatreds that are tolerated at the margins eventually migrate to the center.

There is still time for global leaders at Davos to correct this. A simple acknowledgment that antisemitism is rising and is intolerable would matter. A commitment to study and counter it would matter even more.

The world has no shortage of difficult problems. Yet, some problems are made harder by silence. To ignore the spread of antisemitism at a gathering that claims to champion global cooperation would be a moral and strategic failure. A world that prides itself on learning from history should not repeat its worst mistakes.

ESSAY 49

Divided by Hate, Not United by Diversity

Ynet Global, 17/2/2026. https://www.ynetnews.com/opinions-analysis/article/hkkzmwb0011l

The idea of "Normative Power Europe" has been widely celebrated in academic and policy circles as Europe's claim to moral authority in the world. It suggests that the European Union (EU) comprises not just markets and treaties but values, such as the rule of law, democracy, respect for human rights and the protection of minorities. But the latest data on antisemitism in the EU calls this self-image into doubt.

When Jewish communities do not feel secure and respected in Europe's cities, schools, and public spaces, it signals Europe's failure in one of its most fundamental obligations to its own citizens, an obligation at the core of what it claims to represent in the international arena.

The *Special Eurobarometer 570: Perceptions of Antisemitism*, published in early February, makes it plain that antisemitism – from graffiti and hostile language in public space to online hostility – is widespread in many EU member states. According to the survey, more than half of Europeans now identify antisemitism as a problem in their own countries, and nearly half believe it has increased over the past five years. Hostility in public is the most commonly cited manifestation, followed closely by antisemitic vandalism and online hate.

The numbers do not fully convey the human reality behind them: Jewish citizens feel unsafe on the street, encounter stereotypes at school and see their history

reduced or distorted in public discourse. Antisemitism is not merely an abstract "problem" measured in percentages. It is a lived experience of exclusion, anxiety and, in some cases, outright physical threat and violence. And the fact that concern about antisemitism is greatest in countries like France, Italy and Sweden – countries often seen as Europe's cultural leaders – should sound a profound alarm.

Europe's values are not abstract principles policed by diplomats in Brussels. They should be the lived reality of every person on the continent. A Europe that allows Jewish communities to feel unsafe cannot credibly claim to be a bastion of human rights. A Europe where hostility toward Jews goes unchallenged in public squares, on walls, and online cannot credibly claim to be united through diversity. And a Europe that tolerates antisemitism cannot claim leadership on the global stage on issues of discrimination and minority rights.

Europe's self-image as a defender of rights and a beacon of democratic values depends on its willingness to confront difficult truths. In the past two years, the October 7 massacre and the ensuing multi-front war have influenced perceptions and stoked tensions across Europe. Nearly seven in 10 Europeans believe that external conflicts affect how Jewish people are viewed in their own countries. But, of course, the root of antisemitism is not simply geopolitics. It is a long-standing prejudice that predates and outlives any single conflict. The persistence of this prejudice shows that Europe still harbors divisions that run deeper than disagreements over foreign policy.

It is not enough for the EU to declare antisemitism "unacceptable." Strongly-worded statements must be backed by effective action. Strengthening education on the Holocaust and Jewish history, enforcing anti-hate laws, supporting community security initiatives, and publicly confronting antisemitic rhetoric at every level of society are essential. EU institutions and member states must treat antisemitism with the urgency it requires, not as a peripheral issue but as central to the health of European society.

Moreover, this is not solely a Jewish issue. A society that tolerates antisemitism is a society in which all minorities are at risk. History shows that antisemitism often appears alongside other forms of hate; it is both a symptom and a driver of broader social intolerance. Failing to combat it effectively weakens social cohesion

and undermines trust in democratic institutions. A Europe that is divided by hate cannot hope to deepen its union. Its claim to universal values rings hollow when a significant portion of its population feels marginalized or threatened.

European leaders must also resist the temptation to regard antisemitism as a distant or fringe problem. When nearly three in five Europeans report hostility toward Jews in public places and online, and when this sentiment is recognized across age groups and countries, it is not a marginal trend. It is a societal challenge that demands a comprehensive strategy that includes civil society engagement, law enforcement training, curriculum reform, and political leadership that speaks not just in condemnations but in concrete action and measurable progress.

The story of Europe as a normative power should not be an exercise in vanity. It should be grounded in reality, in the actual protection and flourishing of all Europeans. Europe can be a champion of rights on the world stage, but only if it first ensures that Jews feel secure walking to synagogue, that schoolchildren learn history with honesty and respect, and that antisemitism is treated as a threat to democratic life, not a problem to be tolerated.

A Europe that fails to protect its Jewish communities fails itself and its own history. It also fails its future. Only by confronting antisemitism with clarity, resolve, and sustained action can Europe live up to the values it espouses. Anything less risks turning the concept of "Normative Power Europe" into an empty slogan, not a lived reality.

ESSAY 50

Israel, Taiwan, and Global Diplomacy in the Year of the Fire Horse

The Jerusalem Post, 21/2/2026. https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-887223?utm_source=jpost.app.apple&utm_medium=share

This month has captured the paradox of the modern world with unusual clarity.

Conflicts intensify. Rivalries sharpen. Global sporting spectacles pepper the media with universal stories of triumph and heartbreak. Sacred traditions unfurl. Diplomatic initiatives invoke the language of peace.

Events that span regions and cultures are not isolated episodes, but interwoven threads that reveal how contemporary geopolitics is shaped not only by military power and strategic competition, but also by identity, symbolism, legitimacy, and the enduring rhythms of civilization.

In the Middle East, Israel's determination to disarm Hamas continues to reverberate, and talks between the US and Iran loom large. These negotiations exist alongside unmistakable military signaling, with American deployments and Iranian exercises underscoring the fragile balance between deterrence and escalation.

The uncertainty surrounding these negotiations is itself geopolitically significant. Diplomacy, in this context, is not merely a technical process: It is a high-stakes game that could either stabilize a volatile environment or make way for broader confrontation. The prospect that dialogue may lead either to agreement or to conflict illustrates a defining feature of 21st century international politics: the coexistence of engagement and brinkmanship.

Technology, diplomacy, and the new geopolitical balance

At the same time, persistent tensions between China and Taiwan hang in the East Asian air and far beyond. Military signaling, economic interdependence, technological rivalry, and diplomatic ambiguity combine to produce one of the most sensitive global flashpoints. Taipei's centrality to global semiconductor production ties regional stability to worldwide technological and economic systems.

The US plays a pivotal role across both theaters. The potential for American intervention influences deterrence calculations, alliance structures, strategic expectations, and diplomatic leverage. But contemporary geopolitical influence is rarely exerted through hard power alone. Legitimacy, credibility, and soft power increasingly shape how strength is perceived and contested.

In mid-February 2026, the interplay between hard reality and symbolic unity is particularly striking, as moments of global cultural and civic resonance unfold among the geopolitical tensions.

The lunar New Year, ushering in the Year of the Fire Horse, is celebrated across East Asia and throughout global Chinese communities. This civilizational observance is structured around renewal, reflection, and continuity. Within traditional symbolism, the horse represents energy, resilience, and forward movement – all the more so when it is the Fire Horse. These themes weigh powerfully within societies navigating uncertainty and strategic tension.

Taiwan's celebration reflects a nuanced duality. Cultural continuity with Chinese civilization coexists with political distinctiveness. Tradition anchors identity in an environment defined by geopolitical complexity. Heritage is not merely ceremonial in this context. It is laced with questions of belonging and recognition.

Added to this convergence, the first night of Ramadan begins this month. Ramadan reshapes daily rhythms across vast regions, emphasizing reflection, discipline, and communal cohesion. In societies marked by political strain and regional conflict, it provides a continuity that transcends the immediacy of crisis. Sacred calendars reinforce collective identity and stability within environments defined by uncertainty.

The Jewish dimension offers further insight into these parallel rhythms. Jewish history is sculpted by cycles of renewal embedded within ritual, memory, and cultural continuity. Across centuries, Jewish communities have often navigated precarious political landscapes through intellectual achievement, education, and communal cohesion. Tradition has functioned as both a spiritual expression and a resilience strategy.

Modern Israel reflects aspects of this inheritance. Innovation, education, and technological creativity operate alongside security imperatives. The nation's global influence derives as much from human capital and intellectual contribution as from military capability. Israel's soft power – however challenged at the moment – emerges not as an alternative to hard security, but as its complement.

Taiwan presents a structurally comparable logic. Its global significance derives less from territorial scale than from specialization, expertise, and technological centrality, with human capital as a strategic resource, and innovation as influence. In both societies, resilience is cultivated across multiple dimensions.

And then there is the inauguration of President Trump's Board of Peace. Whatever its practical implications, the initiative underscores the enduring role of symbolism and narrative in contemporary politics. In an era defined by conflict and rivalry, the invocation of peace becomes itself a strategic gesture. Language, perception, and signaling shape geopolitical environments alongside material capabilities.

Global culture joins diplomacy and tradition through the Winter Olympics in Milan and Cortina. The Olympic Games remain one of the few arenas where nations gather within a shared symbolic framework. Athletic competition intersects with diplomacy, prestige, and identity projection. Athletes become ambassadors; participation becomes a performance of belonging.

For Taiwan, whose international status remains uniquely constrained, sporting visibility functions as a form of diplomatic engagement. Representation, even under political limitations, signals presence within the international community. For Israel and many other states, international sport offers a semblance of integration amid the minefields of geopolitics.

Viewed together, this month's spectacular convergence illuminates a broader transformation of the nature of power. Traditional geopolitics emphasized

territory, population, and military strength; contemporary international politics increasingly rewards adaptability, technological relevance, legitimacy, and narrative framing. Soft power, cultural continuity, symbolic participation, and perception management are no longer peripheral considerations: They are central to how influence is cultivated.

This simultaneity reveals a fundamental truth about the modern international system. Conflict and continuity coexist. Wars and negotiations, rivalries and rituals, sporting spectacles and diplomatic initiatives all unfold simultaneously. The world does not pause for crises. Instead, geopolitical tensions and civilizational rhythms shape and amplify one another.

The Year of the Fire Horse evokes movement and resilience. Ramadan evokes reflection and discipline. The Olympics evoke excellence and shared humanity. Diplomatic negotiations evoke the fragile balance between confrontation and accommodation. Political initiatives evoke the enduring appeal of peace as a narrative and an aspiration.

For societies navigating volatile environments, this coexistence is not theoretical – it is reality. Identity projection, cultural participation, technological leadership, and symbolic engagement operate alongside deterrence and defense. Survival and influence require multidimensional strategies that span the physical, psychological, and symbolic.

For major powers like the US, the lesson is equally clear. Credibility is measured not only by military commitments but also by the capacity to sustain institutions, narratives, and global spaces where interaction remains possible even amid tension.

Ultimately, the defining challenge of our era is not only conflict management. It is navigating a world where geopolitical tension, cultural continuity, religious observance, and symbolic politics unfold side by side. In such a world, realism must coexist with strategic humility and cultural literacy, recognizing that power is shaped as much by perception, identity, and legitimacy as by force.

ESSAY 51

This Is the Death of the Western Liberal Order

The Times of Israel, 21/3/2026. https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/this-is-the-death-of-the-western-liberal-order/

I want to tell you about a woman named Daria Boyarskaya, because her story reveals almost everything about the condition of the Western liberal order in the spring of 2026.

Boyarskaya is a Russian national who today serves as a senior adviser at the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Parliamentary Assembly in Vienna, one of the central institutions of European democratic oversight. She moved directly from university into Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and built her career inside state-linked institutions. In 2019, she sat inches from Vladimir Putin at the G20 summit in Osaka, serving as his personal English interpreter during his meeting with Donald Trump. Very few people outside the Kremlin have ever been in that room. Positions of that kind are never assigned casually. They require demonstrated loyalty, absolute discretion, and a proven alignment with the priorities of the leadership being served.

In 2022, Poland's internal security agency declared her persona non grata. Warsaw concluded that her activities posed a meaningful risk of influence operations damaging to Poland's international standing. A NATO ally looked at her background and said: not here, not now, not under these conditions. That judgment reflected a hard-earned understanding that certain affiliations carry implications that do not disappear simply because someone changes jobs, receives a new title, or moves to a different city.

Now fast forward to today. Russia's war against Ukraine has entered its fifth year and reshaped Europe's entire security landscape in ways that would have seemed unthinkable a decade ago. In this context, Boyarskaya is coordinating the OSCE's election monitoring mission for Hungary's April 12 elections, one of the most geopolitically consequential votes in Europe in years. She organizes

the meetings, invites the participants, attends every session, and records what is said. She determines, in practice, what international observers see, what they hear, and what they report.

The OSCE's response to concerns raised about this arrangement? A spokesperson described her as a professional international civil servant bound by staff rules and a code of conduct.

Read that again, slowly. A woman barred by a NATO ally is overseeing democracy monitoring at a moment of acute vulnerability, and the institution responsible sees no problem. That is not a reassuring answer. It is a revealing one.

The Hungarian Helsinki Committee formally requested her removal. The OSCE Secretary General expressed full confidence in her professionalism. The rights groups replied with one word: disappointed. It reflects not outrage but resignation. Not shock but recognition. And that single word, more than any formal protest, captures something essential about where the Western liberal order stands today: its institutions have not been defeated from the outside. They have stopped seeing clearly from within.

That pattern of institutional blindness is not confined to Vienna. It is, in fact, the defining feature of this moment. And nowhere is it more painfully visible than in the failure to protect the most historically vulnerable minority in European history.

Since October 7, 2023, Jewish communities across Europe have lived through a wave of antisemitism not seen in decades, and the current US-Israel war against Iran is intensifying it further. Schools behind barriers. Guards at synagogue doors. Students harassed on campuses. Families concealing their identity in cities that once prided themselves on tolerance. The data is not contested. The trend lines are not ambiguous. Europe has been here before. It promised itself, solemnly and repeatedly, that it never would be again. That promise was not a sentiment. It was written into laws, institutions, and frameworks specifically designed to make the recurrence of such hatred structurally impossible.

Those frameworks are not holding.

The Western liberal order made a specific promise here. It promised that the safety and dignity of minorities would be protected regardless of geopolitical

events happening thousands of kilometers away. It promised that a Jewish family in Amsterdam or Paris would not be held responsible for decisions made in Jerusalem. It promised, in other words, that it had genuinely internalized the lessons of the 20th century and that those lessons were permanent, structural, and immune to the pressures of the news cycle.

That promise is being broken in real time. The institutional response has been strikingly familiar: expressions of concern, condemnations issued, working groups convened, and then a quiet return to business as usual while Jewish communities reinforce their perimeters and parents have conversations with their children that no parent in a liberal democracy should ever have to have.

Nothing in geopolitics justifies targeting Jewish individuals or institutions. The perpetrators bear their own full responsibility. But the question the liberal order must answer goes beyond moral responsibility for individual acts. The question is whether its institutions are functioning as designed. Whether the frameworks built after the Holocaust are actually holding. Whether the promise, made in the shadow of catastrophe, is being kept.

The evidence suggests it is not.

These two stories are the same story. That is the point.

In both cases, an institution of the Western liberal order is confronted with an obvious failure and responds by citing its own procedures. In both cases, frameworks built for a more stable and more trusting world are being applied to a world that has fundamentally changed. In both cases, the order chooses process over courage, reassurance over accountability, and administrative comfort over the harder work of actually defending what it claims to stand for. The OSCE was built on the assumption that all participants accept, at some basic level, the legitimacy of shared norms. The promise of minority protection was built on the assumption that European societies had made a permanent moral reckoning with their past. Both assumptions are now under severe pressure. And in both cases, the institutions have responded identically: by expressing confidence in their own adequacy while the ground shifts beneath them.

The fox has been given the organizational chart, invited into every meeting, and trusted to take the minutes. And in the streets outside, the oldest hatred in

European history is building again, met by the same working groups, the same drafted statements, and the same structural inaction.

That is not a system under pressure from the outside. That is a system that has forgotten, from the inside, why it was built.

That is where we are. And it should frighten us all.

ESSAY 52

The IDF's Blind Spot: It Needs a Diaspora Adviser

The Times of Israel, 31/3/2026. https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/the-idfs-blind-spot-it-needs-a-diaspora-adviser/

As the Iran war escalates, a familiar and painful pattern is once again emerging. The military confrontation may take place thousands of miles from many Jewish communities, yet the consequences are felt immediately and intensely across the Jewish world. Synagogues increase security, Jewish schools review emergency procedures, and Jewish families think twice before displaying symbols of their identity in public.

This reality is not theoretical. It is happening now.

Last week, several Jewish institutions in the Netherlands were attacked in incidents that shocked the local community and prompted urgent security responses. The message is unmistakable: when conflict involving Israel intensifies, Jewish communities everywhere become targets. The perpetrators do not distinguish between Israeli government policy and Jewish life abroad. To them, the two are interchangeable.

The surge of antisemitism that followed the onset of the Israel-Hamas war demonstrated how quickly hostility can spread across continents. Jewish community centers in Europe were vandalized. Students on university campuses

reported harassment and threats. Synagogues required armed guards in cities where Jewish life had previously felt relatively secure.

Now, as the war with Iran unfolds, Jewish communities once again find themselves on the front line of unintended consequences. Throughout modern history, geopolitical crises involving Israel have produced ripple effects for Jews worldwide – from political protests to outright violence against Jewish individuals and institutions. When wars are fought in the Middle East, Jewish communities in Paris, Amsterdam, Sydney, Buenos Aires, Toronto, and New York feel the impact within hours.

This doesn't mean that Israel should make military decisions based on how those decisions might affect Jews abroad. Israel is a sovereign state responsible first and foremost for the security of its citizens. When it faces existential threats, it must respond according to its own strategic needs.

But acknowledging this principle does not mean ignoring another obvious reality. The actions of the Israeli government carry global consequences for Jewish communities. Those consequences deserve to be part of the conversation, even if they are not the determining factor. Remarkably, they are rarely discussed at all.

Israel's security establishment is characterized by a structured decision-making process. Military operations are examined from multiple perspectives. Legal advisers evaluate the implications of every significant action. Senior commanders debate operational considerations. The chief of the general staff receives input from a gender affairs adviser. These layers of consultation exist because modern warfare is not only about tactics and firepower. It is also about law, diplomacy, public perception, and social impact.

Given this reality, one must ask a simple question: why is there no formal advisory role within the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) dedicated to assessing the implications of military actions for Jewish communities around the world?

Appointing an IDF Diaspora affairs adviser would not be tantamount to dictating strategy or overriding security priorities. The role would instead ensure that military command understands how specific operations might reverberate far beyond the battlefield. Such an adviser could brief commanders on likely spikes in antisemitic incidents following major operations, coordinate with Jewish

organizations responsible for community security abroad, and assess how different types of military action could affect Jewish institutions in vulnerable regions.

In other words, they could bring a perspective that is currently missing into the room.

This proposal is not about shifting responsibility away from those who commit antisemitic acts. The blame for attacks against Jewish communities lies squarely with the perpetrators and with the societies that allow such hatred to flourish. No government decision ever justifies violence against innocent people. But ignoring the predictable consequences of geopolitical actions does not make those consequences disappear.

Jewish communities abroad are not simply observers of events in the Middle East. They are often regarded by others as representatives of Israel, whether they wish to be or not. When tensions escalate, they are the ones who must reinforce security, reassure worried parents, and explain to their neighbors that they should not be held responsible for the policies of a distant government.

Across Europe, North America, and Australia, Jewish institutions already devote enormous resources to security. Many synagogues resemble fortified edifices. Jewish schools conduct regular safety drills. Community leaders spend countless hours coordinating with law enforcement agencies. Every new conflict adds another layer of anxiety.

This is why the absence of any formal mechanism within Israel's military command to consider possible implications for the Diaspora is so striking. It assumes that the fate of Jewish communities abroad exists entirely outside its strategic picture.

The Jewish people has always been interconnected across borders. Israel was founded not only as a refuge but as a central pillar of global Jewish life. The relationship between Israel and the Diaspora has long been presented as a brotherhood, and brotherhood requires awareness of shared realities.

Recognizing the vulnerability of Jewish communities worldwide does not weaken the IDF, an institution that has long known how to mobilize support and solidarity from the Diaspora when needed. If anything, such recognition strengthens the

broader Jewish world by acknowledging that security challenges do not end at national borders.

Wars may be fought by states, but their consequences are often borne by communities far removed from the battlefield. Jewish communities abroad understand that Israel must defend itself. They do not expect to determine its military strategy. But they deserve at least to be part of the strategic awareness. Because when the fighting begins in the Middle East, Jews everywhere brace themselves for what comes next.

ESSAY 53

Orbán Didn't Win. Neither Did Liberal Democracy (with Yonatan Touval)

Haaretz, 20/4/2026. https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/2026-04-20/ty-article-opinion/.premium/orban-didnt-win-neither-did-liberal-democracy/0000019d-a5ab-df26-a1bf-a5eb0a720000

A week after Péter Magyar's landslide victory ended Viktor Orbán's 16-year rule – winning 141 of 199 seats, a two-thirds supermajority, and some 3.3 million votes – the Western commentary has already settled into a familiar, self-congratulatory groove: Orbánism defeated, Europe vindicated, democracy restored.

The temptation is to read this as a triumph of liberal democracy over illiberal nationalism. Resist it. What happened in Budapest was at once simpler and more unsettling. Bertolt Brecht put it bluntly in *The Threepenny Opera*: "First comes eating, then comes morality." Morality can wear any flag; the eating comes first regardless. What defeated Orbán was not the European ideal, the rule of law, or a sudden dream of a more open Hungary. It was the grocery bill.

Hungary's economy grew by barely half a percent in 2024 and just 0.4% in 2025 – falling disastrously short of the government's once-trumpeted 3.4% forecast. Since 2020, cumulative inflation has reached roughly 57%, nearly double the EU

average. Romania has moved ahead of Hungary in per capita income, and by the latest Eurostat measures, Hungary has sunk into the EU's bottom tier for both economic output and household living standards.

More than 360,000 Hungarians have emigrated in search of wages their own country could no longer provide, leaving behind an economy the IMF describes as mired in "stagnant output over the past three years." Viktor Orbán offered sovereignty, Christian nationalism, and warnings that Magyar would drag Hungary into the Ukraine war. Voters wanted to know why their money bought so little.

Budapest confirms a pattern, but the pattern is ideologically indiscriminate. In Poland in October 2023, the right-wing Law and Justice (PiS) party lost its majority after inflation peaked at nearly 20%. In Britain in July 2024, the Conservatives suffered their worst defeat in nearly two centuries amid collapsing real incomes. In Germany in February 2025, the center-left SPD sank to its worst postwar result after two years of economic contraction, while the far-right AfD doubled its vote share to take second place.

And in the United States in November 2024, the center-left Democrats lost despite GDP growth of 2.7% – because cumulative prices had risen 20% since 2021, and no amount of favorable data could make eggs affordable again.

Right-wing populists, center-right conservatives, center-left social democrats: the political thermostat does not check your ideology at the door. It punishes whoever is in office when life becomes unaffordable.

"It's the economy, stupid," James Carville famously wrote on a whiteboard in Little Rock in 1992. The phrase is both obviously true and analytically vacant. It tells you that the economy matters, but nothing about when, how, or under what conditions.

The elections of 2023-2026 teach a more specific and uncomfortable lesson: the economy never speaks for itself, but when hardship becomes visible and responsibility is clear, it can overpower the ideological stories governments tell about it. It elevated Orbán in the first place – the prosperity of his early years was real – and it removed him when that prosperity evaporated.

The same mechanism, under different circumstances, could just as easily punish a reformer who inherits a broken economy. Magyar should take note. He inherits

a gutted state, oligarchic fortunes that will likely prove unrecoverable, and a population whose patience is measured in grocery receipts.

What makes the Hungarian and Polish cases distinctive is a paradox. Both Orbán and PiS had spent years concentrating power – capturing courts, subordinating media, hollowing out independent institutions. This was intended to make them invulnerable; instead, it made them uniquely exposed. In a coalition government, blame is diffuse; each party can point at the other.

But Orbán and PiS had no one to point at. They built systems in which a single party governed alone, visibly and totally, and when the economy soured, every voter knew exactly whom to blame. Concentrated power is a trap: magnificent on the way up, lethal on the way down.

A less noticed element in this shift is the EU's conditionality mechanism. Both Hungary and Poland saw billions in funds frozen by the European Commission over rule-of-law violations: roughly €18 billion for Hungary and €137 billion for Poland. In both countries, the opposition campaigned on a promise of rare specificity: Elect us, and the money flows. These frozen funds turned "European values" from a rhetorical aspiration into an economic fact – a visible, quantifiable price tag for illiberal governance. The EU did not remove Orbán; Hungarian voters did. But the EU made the cost of keeping him measurable.

In both cases, the incumbent tried to override economic pain with cultural mobilization – migration, "Brussels bureaucrats," the Ukraine war, and LGBTQ rights. Both failed. This demands an explanation, as cultural appeals have succeeded elsewhere: the 2016 Brexit referendum succeeded partly on immigration; Trump won in 2024 on a similar mix; and Le Pen's party topped French polls on similar themes.

The difference is attribution. Cultural diversion works when economic pain can be blamed on outsiders – immigrants, foreign competition, distant technocrats. In Hungary and Poland, the economic failure was transparently domestic: stagnation born of misgovernance, EU funds frozen because of their own rule-of-law violations, and emigration driven by wages they failed to raise. When voters can see that the wound is self-inflicted, no story about foreign enemies will cover it.

Tens of thousands celebrated along the Danube on election night – pálinka, tears, and a poet comparing the mood to 1989. The comparison was richer than he may have known. Orbán launched his career in 1989 with a speech demanding Soviet withdrawal; 37 years later, the crowd was celebrating his own removal with the same revolutionary joy. He had become the thing he overthrew.

The thermostat spares no one. It removed Orbán. It will remove anyone who fails the same test. First comes eating. The morality follows – or it doesn't.

ESSAY 54

Location, Location, Location: The Road Zionism Took

eJewishPhilanthropy, 22/4/2026. https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/location-location-location-the-road-zionism-took/

In separate novels, Yossi Avni-Levy and Michael Chabon imagine Jewish sovereignty built somewhere other than Israel, and in doing so converge on the same unsettling question: What if the state had been built on different ground?

In *An Ode to Sins*, Avni-Levy centers his narrative on a quiet provocation. It is not a return to Poland to mourn what was destroyed, but a question directed at the present: What might we have built somewhere else? A Jewish state not recovered from history but chosen in spite of it. Chabon poses a similar question in *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*. His Alaska is unstable and temporary. It offers no promise of safety. Yet it sits at the edge of the world rather than its center, unburdened by competing religious, national and historical claims.

These imagined geographies are not better, but they are simpler. They strip away layers of meaning that, in Israel, cannot be set aside.

That difference is not just cultural or symbolic. It is structural. Israel's location does not merely complicate its politics. It places the country within an overlapping system of regional, religious, and international pressures in which conflict

continually regenerates and cannot be resolved through military force alone. This is the key reality both novels illuminate.

Zionism made a different choice. The "Uganda Scheme" failed not because it was impractical, but because it was insufficient. Zionism chose return over relocation. It chose a place saturated with meaning rather than one that might have been governed more quietly. That choice produced both power and constraint.

Before statehood, Jews lived with vulnerability and without sovereignty. Today's Israel exists in a region where sovereignty itself is contested. The result is not only strength. It is exposure. Exposure here does not connote weakness. It means living at the intersection of risk, consequence and great-power pressure. Israel is both threatened and central. Its location draws in allies and adversaries alike. Its conflicts do not remain local. They accumulate meaning and attract wider involvement.

What the imagined settings of Avni-Levy and Chabon simplify, Israel cannot escape. The contrast with Poland or Alaska is not about nostalgia or fantasy. It is the difference between contained conflict and a system in which every confrontation expands.

In both novels, conflict is sometimes violent, even existential, yet it remains contained. It does not simultaneously activate religion, regional rivalry, global diplomacy, historical grievances, and identity all at once. In Israel, it does.

A war in Gaza is never only about Gaza. It is also about Palestinian political status, Israeli security, religious narratives, Arab public opinion, and international pressure. The northern border is not only about Hezbollah. It is part of a wider alignment that runs through Iran and beyond. Each arena reinforces the others. These are not separate fronts but expressions of a single structure. Pressure in one place does not stay put. It travels. That is what turns tactical success into strategic repetition.

Inside Israel, debate often focuses on calibration: too much force or too little, strike harder or hold back longer. This assumes that the correct application of force can produce stability. Experience suggests otherwise. Israel has acted with overwhelming force and with restraint at different moments. Neither has prevented the same conflicts from returning in altered form. Military action

changes capabilities. It rarely changes the system in which those capabilities acquire meaning.

Hamas can be degraded, but the political conditions that sustain its appeal persist. Hezbollah can be deterred, but the regional network behind it remains intact. Iran can be confronted, but it is a state that learns. It absorbs pressure, tests limits and adjusts. An adaptive system cannot be stabilized by repeating the same moves within it.

This is the tension at the center of Israel's position. The same centrality that exposes it also strengthens it. It brings strategic alliances, economic depth, and expanding ties with parts of the Arab world. Reducing exposure would carry real costs. The challenge is not to step away from centrality, but to use it differently.

For Israelis, this is not abstract. It is reserve duty that returns year after year. It is the sense that each round ends without closure. It is the recognition that the next escalation is already forming. If repetition is built into the structure, then the response must address the structure itself.

In the Palestinian arena, the absence of a political horizon is not neutral. It shapes every subsequent round of violence. As long as millions of Palestinians live without a defined political future or a credible path toward one, movements built on resistance will continue to regenerate support even after severe military defeat. This is not about engaging those who reject coexistence. It is about changing the conditions that make endless resistance appear to be the only available future.

Across the region, Israel is already part of a network of states, whether it fully acknowledges this or not. Each relationship that deepens its integration into that network changes how pressure is distributed. Conflict does not disappear, but its weight can be redistributed so that no single front carries the full burden.

Iran operates across all these arenas. Confrontation will continue. It cannot be avoided at times. But confrontation alone has not produced lasting change in its behavior. Iran expands where fragmentation creates opportunity and pulls back where pressure is concentrated. The task is twofold: raise the cost of its regional activity while reducing the fragmentation that allows its proxies to operate.

None of this produces a decisive conclusion. It points instead to a different direction: away from reacting to each eruption and toward altering the conditions that make these cycles recur. That shift is slower and less visible, and more

demanding, because it requires acting on problems that do not yield immediate results.

Avni-Levy and Chabon make that demand harder to ignore. By placing Jewish sovereignty elsewhere, they reveal how much of Israel's reality is shaped by where it sits. Poland was a graveyard. Alaska was fiction. Uganda was a fleeting moment. Israel is the only road that was taken. The question is whether it continues in circles.

ESSAY 55

The Music Belongs to the Country

The Jerusalem Post Printed Edition, 11/11/2026, page 10.
The Jerusalem Post, 16/11/2026. https://jpost.com/opinion/article-914315

I recently finished rereading Joseph Roth's *The Radetzky March*. This time, I found myself thinking about Israel.

Perhaps it was the timing. In May, Roth's masterpiece, first published in German in 1932, returned to Israeli bookstores in a new Hebrew edition, translated by Ilana Hammerman. Then came the October 27 election, and this story of the Habsburg Empire's final decades suddenly felt closer to home.

Not because Benjamin Netanyahu resembles Emperor Franz Joseph, or because Israel is an empire approaching collapse. What interested me was something simpler: how hard it becomes to imagine politics without someone who has dominated it for so long.

Roth tells the story of three generations of the Trotta family. It begins in 1859, when Joseph Trotta saves the emperor's life at the Battle of Solferino. His courage earns him a title and a place in imperial history. Yet Austria lost the battle. The family's great patriotic legend was born from defeat.

Years later, Trotta discovers that a school textbook has turned his actions into an exaggerated tale of heroism. He protests to the emperor himself. The account

eventually disappears, but Trotta leaves the army, disillusioned with an institution he once admired. He is not rejecting his country. He cares enough about it to insist that its history be truthful.

Reading those pages, I thought about Israel's debate over October 7. More than three years have passed, and Israelis are still arguing about responsibility. Who failed? Who knew what? And who will ultimately tell the story future generations learn?

The dispute over a state commission of inquiry reflects these disagreements. The government argues that a different appointment mechanism would command broader public confidence. Critics insist that the established procedure would better protect the investigation's independence. Whatever the mechanism, an investigation should discover what happened, not validate what politicians already believe.

Trotta wanted the truth restored to a textbook. The families of October 7 deserve an investigation whose conclusions have not been determined in advance.

The election leaves Netanyahu in office, but his political future remains uncertain. His opponents want to replace him, yet still cannot agree on how to form a government.

For years, Israeli politics has revolved around one man. His supporters see him as indispensable. His opponents have devoted enormous energy to removing him. But what happens the morning after?

One of the characters who stayed with me most was Franz von Trotta, the district commissioner who devotes his life to serving Emperor Franz Joseph. He is decent, dutiful, and sincerely loyal. But that loyalty comes at a price. After so many years serving the emperor and the monarchy, he can scarcely imagine life without them. Near the novel's end, the emperor dies. Two years later, the grieving commissioner dies too. The world he knew is gone, and he cannot find his place in what follows. His son, Carl Joseph, inherits expectations and loyalties he never chose, and struggles in a society that no longer makes much sense to him.

Many young Israelis have known scarcely any other prime minister. Whether they admire Netanyahu or oppose him, they have inherited a political culture built around him. For his supporters, the difficult realization may be that loyalty

to Israel and loyalty to Netanyahu are not the same thing. For his opponents, removing Netanyahu may have become a substitute for explaining what they would actually do differently.

There is another reason Roth's novel speaks to me. Born in 1894 into a Jewish family in Galicia, then part of the Habsburg Empire, he grew up in a society where someone could be Jewish, speak German, and feel attached to a state composed of many peoples.

That empire was hardly ideal. Antisemitism was real, and discrimination was part of everyday life. Yet Roth mourned its disappearance because it had offered minorities a way to belong without sharing the nationality of the majority. He distrusted nationalism, including Zionism, and feared what happened when ancestry became the measure of belonging. Roth died in exile in Paris in 1939, shortly before the Holocaust would demonstrate so terribly why Jewish sovereignty mattered.

Reading him again as an Israeli, I was struck by the reversal. Roth was a Jew mourning the loss of a political order in which Jews had been a minority. Israel was created so that Jews would no longer have to depend on others for their collective security.

But what happens when Jews become the majority? How does a Jewish state ensure that its Arab citizens can participate fully in political life? The question is not new. The 2018 Basic Law defining Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people brought it into sharp focus.

Now Arab parties have won a record 19 seats. Their representatives could help determine Israel's next government, yet several Jewish party leaders remain unwilling to rely on their parliamentary support. The reversal is striking. A state created to free Jews from dependence on others now finds itself uneasy with the prospect of political dependence on its own Arab citizens.

The historical circumstances are different, of course. Many Arab citizens identify as Palestinians, and their representatives disagree profoundly about Israel's character and future. Those differences are real and cannot be wished away.

But there is a precedent. In 2021, Mansour Abbas's Ra'am joined the Bennett-Lapid coalition. Abbas later publicly acknowledged Israel's Jewish character. The

experiment showed both that partnership was possible and how difficult it could be to sustain.

Jewish political leaders should explain under what conditions they would govern with Arab parties. Arab leaders should be equally clear about the commitments and compromises they would bring to such a government. The question is no longer whether partnership is imaginable; Israel has already seen it happen. The question is whether it can endure.

Roth's Habsburg Empire could not adapt to the changes taking place within it. Israel has something the monarchy lacked: democratic institutions that allow governments to change without the state itself coming apart. Whether Netanyahu stays or goes, Israelis will still have to confront October 7, rebuild trust, and make room for Arab citizens to help shape the country's future.

There is a lovely tradition at Vienna's New Year's Concert. When the orchestra plays the Radetzky March, the conductor turns toward the audience and invites everyone to clap along.

The march was composed in 1848 to celebrate an imperial military victory over an Italian national movement. Today, that familiar music offers a different image: an entire hall joining in. The conductor matters. But the music belongs to the country.

ESSAY 56

When Diplomats Can't Read the Shadows

The Jerusalem Post, 23/6/2026. https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-900227

"I can't fight the shadows all the time."

That was the European Union's (EU) foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas's response on X/Twitter to Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar after reports that she had likened Israel's policies to apartheid South Africa during a closed-door diplomatic meeting.

The phrase did not calm the dispute. It deepened it.

According to reports from Jerusalem, some Israeli officials interpreted the remark as a veiled political message directed at Germany, and as further evidence that Kallas had come under growing French influence within the EU.

Israel's objection was understandable. If the EU's top diplomat compared Israel to apartheid South Africa, Israel had every right to reject the accusation forcefully. That is not the issue.

The issue is what came next.

The more revealing aspect of the exchange may not be what Kallas intended, but how quickly her unusual choice of words was interpreted primarily through a political lens. The controversy reveals a larger diplomatic problem: too often, unfamiliar language is treated as strategy before it is examined as culture.

Diplomacy begins with language. Yet language is never merely vocabulary. Every language carries its own history, literature, symbols, and collective memory. Words rarely travel alone. They arrive shaped by the culture that produced them. When diplomats forget this, they risk misunderstanding not only individual expressions but also the intentions behind them.

To a native English speaker, “I can’t fight the shadows” sounds unusual. English reaches more naturally for expressions such as “I can’t fight ghosts,” “I can’t chase every rumor,” or “I won’t respond to every allegation.” Kallas chose none of them.

One possible explanation lies in her own cultural background.

Readers familiar with Estonian literature may recognize the recurring presence of forests, silence, darkness, memory, and shadows. These are more than descriptions of nature. They often serve as images through which writers explore identity, survival, fear, historical trauma, and the unseen forces that shape individual and collective life.

This symbolic language reflects Estonia’s history. Centuries of foreign domination, followed by Soviet occupation, censorship, and the struggle to preserve language and national identity, encouraged writers to communicate through metaphor as much as through direct political speech.

Within that tradition, shadows often evoke realities that are present yet difficult to grasp or confront directly. In Estonian cultural memory, nature often becomes a language for history: forest as refuge, silence as survival, darkness as danger, and shadows as the presence of realities difficult to grasp or confront directly.

Against this backdrop, an expression such as *voidelda varjudega*, literally “to fight with shadows,” sounds entirely natural in a literary Estonian register, even though it is not a fixed idiom.

Whether Kallas, former prime minister of Estonia, consciously carried such imagery into English is impossible to know. Nor can anyone say with confidence that this was her intended meaning in her exchange with Sa’ar.

That uncertainty, however, is precisely the point. Diplomacy rarely offers certainty. It demands the discipline of weighing competing interpretations before determining motive.

Anyone familiar with Estonian language and literature would at least recognize Kallas’s wording as a plausible cultural metaphor, not necessarily a concealed strategic message. That possibility alone should have encouraged greater caution before a hidden meaning was assigned to an unfamiliar phrase.

The first duty of diplomacy is curiosity, not certainty.

Whether the Israeli interpretation ultimately proves correct is therefore almost beside the point. One can hold Kallas fully accountable for her reported remarks while still asking whether her language was interpreted with sufficient cultural awareness. Those are separate questions.

Nor is this uniquely an Israeli challenge. Diplomatic history is full of misunderstandings born not of bad intentions but of cultural assumptions. American diplomats have misread indirect communication in Asia. Europeans have misjudged rhetorical traditions in the Middle East. Cross-cultural misunderstanding is among diplomacy's oldest hazards.

Information without cultural interpretation

The recent exchange between Jerusalem and Brussels simply offers an unusually vivid example. Diplomats are typically trained in international law, political science, economics, security studies, negotiation, conflict resolution, and public administration. These disciplines remain indispensable.

Yet foreign relations are conducted not only through legal texts and policy papers, but through people whose thinking has been shaped by literature, history, religion, folklore, and national memory.

Understanding Estonia requires more than reading European Council conclusions. It requires appreciating a society whose modern identity was secured by preserving its language under foreign rule.

It requires recognizing that Estonian literature developed a symbolic vocabulary in which nature frequently became a language for history itself. Forests, silence, darkness, and shadows are not decorative images. Together they form a cultural vocabulary through which public life is understood.

The same principle applies far beyond Estonia. Every European society speaks through its own historical experience. French political language reflects republican universalism. German public discourse remains deeply shaped by 20th century historical responsibility. Polish political debate repeatedly invokes national resistance and martyrdom. Successful diplomacy requires understanding not only institutions but also these cultural languages.

Too often, however, foreign ministries continue to treat cultural knowledge as secondary, something appropriate for universities but peripheral to statecraft. History suggests otherwise.

Many of history's finest diplomats were not only lawyers or politicians. They were historians, linguists, writers, classicists, and scholars of civilization. They understood that political communication rarely operates on the literal level alone. People speak through metaphor, inherited memory, and cultural references that no intelligence report or briefing paper can fully capture.

Israel has invested enormous resources in intelligence gathering and has become exceptionally skilled at collecting information. Yet information without cultural interpretation remains incomplete. Knowing exactly what someone said is fundamentally different from understanding why those particular words were chosen.

Israel has invested heavily in intelligence. It should invest just as seriously in cultural literacy. If Israel wishes to deepen its engagement with Europe, it should broaden the education of its future diplomats. Political science remains essential. International law remains indispensable. But they are not enough.

This need not mean turning diplomats into literary scholars. It means making cultural interpretation a formal part of diplomatic training: language study, literary briefings, historical memory seminars, and country-specific cultural mentoring before postings.

Those who represent Israel abroad should learn not only how nations negotiate but also how nations remember, how metaphors travel across languages, and how culture quietly shapes diplomacy long before negotiations begin.

Diplomacy is often described as the art of choosing the right words. It is equally the art of understanding the words others choose.

Sometimes diplomatic success or failure depends on understanding a metaphor before assigning it a motive. Or, as Kaja Kallas might say, learning to see the shadows.

ESSAY 57

When a Nation Loses the World

The Times of Israel, 27/6/2026. https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/when-a-nation-loses-the-world/

Some figures are too stark to wave away. According to the 2026 Democracy Perception Index, one of the world's largest surveys of global opinion, compiled by Nira Data together with the Alliance of Democracies Foundation, Israel received a net perception score of minus 24, placing it below Afghanistan, North Korea, Iran, and every other country surveyed. Whether or not one accepts the world's verdict, Israel's reputation abroad has never been lower.

That matters because reputation is no longer merely about prestige. It shapes diplomacy, investment, academic cooperation, tourism, and the willingness of allies to stand together in times of crisis. Countries burdened by deeply negative public images face greater resistance, weaker political support, and increasing difficulty persuading others to cooperate. The Democracy Perception Index measures something that has become a strategic asset in its own right: how ordinary people around the world perceive nations.

Israel was not always viewed this way.

For decades it drew on a deep reservoir of goodwill across the democratic world. It was admired as the story of a people rebuilding their homeland after the Holocaust, as a vibrant democracy carrying extraordinary security burdens, and as the "Start-Up Nation," where scientific excellence, technological innovation, and entrepreneurial ambition became defining national strengths. Governments that criticized particular Israeli policies nevertheless distinguished between disagreement over those policies and the legitimacy of the state itself. Israel was respected even when it was contested.

That reputation rested on more than military strength or diplomatic support. It also rested on human capital: leading universities, scientific research, and an entrepreneurial culture. Yet that foundation is showing signs of strain. Recent OECD data analyzed by *The Economist* place Israeli tertiary students near the bottom of participating countries in literacy and numeracy, with particularly weak performance in mathematics. A country's reputation and the quality of

its education may seem like separate stories, yet both reflect the strength of its institutions. Together, they point to a gradual erosion of Israel's national resilience.

That world no longer exists.

Israel had every right, indeed every obligation, to defend its citizens after Hamas carried out the October 7 massacre. Yet modern wars are fought not only on the battlefield but also through diplomacy, multilateral institutions, media coverage, and public opinion. As the war in Gaza continued, images of destruction and humanitarian crisis dominated news coverage around the world. Those images reshaped how hundreds of millions of people viewed Israel. Governments that initially expressed solidarity gradually became more critical. Demonstrations spread across Europe and Latin America. Over time, international attention shifted from the atrocities Hamas had committed to the humanitarian consequences of Israel's military campaign.

It would be comforting to dismiss this as merely a failure of public diplomacy, a war lost in the editing room rather than on the ground. It was not. The scale and duration of the campaign, not merely its presentation abroad, are part of what the world is judging.

The next temptation is to explain the decline solely through the resurgence of antisemitism. Hatred of Jews has indeed risen sharply since October 7, particularly across Europe and North America. But antisemitism cannot fully explain Israel's collapse in international esteem.

When opinion deteriorates not only among Israel's traditional critics but also among many of its closest friends, prejudice alone cannot account for the trend. Blaming antisemitism may provide emotional comfort, but it postpones the harder work of honest self-examination. Nations, like individuals, sometimes have to confront uncomfortable truths before they can change course.

The Netanyahu government bears considerable responsibility for accelerating this decline.

Israeli foreign policy has become reactive rather than strategic. Longstanding partnerships have been strained instead of strengthened. Domestic political considerations have repeatedly outweighed the national interest, while the government has offered no credible vision for resolving the conflict with the

Palestinians. Even sympathetic allies struggle to understand where Israeli policy is heading.

It is one more unwanted record set under Benjamin Netanyahu. History may remember this government not only for the wars it fought, but also for the standing Israel lost while fighting them. After years of political polarization, constitutional turmoil, deteriorating relations with democratic partners, growing concerns about educational performance, and increasing isolation, the country now faces perhaps its gravest strategic challenge: the erosion of the two assets that long underpinned its success, international legitimacy and human capital.

Can this trend be reversed?

Perhaps. But no one should underestimate what that will require.

Public diplomacy matters. Israel has faced biased reporting, double standards, and deliberate disinformation that deserve to be challenged. Yet public diplomacy cannot substitute for policy. No communications campaign, however sophisticated, can bridge the gap between what a government says and what the world believes it sees. It succeeds only when it reinforces credible policy.

Restoring Israel's standing will require far more than better public diplomacy.

It will require leaders willing to rebuild trust with democratic allies, restore diplomacy as a central pillar of national security, articulate a credible political horizon, and renew investment in education, science, and research. Above all, it will require honest engagement with the Palestinian question.

For many Israelis, the idea of a Palestinian state has become inseparable from fears for national security since October 7. Those concerns are genuine and deserve respect. Any future arrangement must guarantee Israel's security and prevent the emergence of another terrorist entity along its borders. Yet postponing a political settlement indefinitely carries profound strategic costs. The absence of a credible political horizon has itself become one of the principal drivers of Israel's growing isolation. Working toward the eventual establishment of a demilitarized Palestinian state under robust regional and international security guarantees would not make Israel universally admired overnight. Nor would it eliminate antisemitism or silence every critic.

It would, however, change the conversation. It would demonstrate that Israel remains committed to a negotiated future rather than perpetual conflict,

strengthen moderate partners across the Middle East, improve relations with Europe and beyond, and make it easier for friendly governments to defend cooperation before their own publics.

One conclusion is already difficult to escape. Reclaiming Israel's standing will require far more than image management. It will demand political courage, diplomatic imagination, stronger institutions, renewed educational excellence, and a willingness to confront difficult realities rather than explain them away. A nation's good name is not handed down by fate. It is built through choices. If Israel hopes once again to become a country that others admire, trust, and seek as a partner, it must change not only how it speaks to the world, but also the choices through which the world judges it.

ESSAY 58

Israel's Next Front: The Power of Attraction

Jewish Journal, 5/8/2026. https://jewishjournal.com/commentary/opinion/390819/israels-next-front-the-power-of-attraction/

Israel has spent much of the past three years demonstrating extraordinary military capability, degrading much of Hamas' infrastructure, severely weakening Hezbollah, and projecting power deep into Iran.

Yet those battlefield gains have not translated into greater international influence. As Israel's military reach expanded, its diplomatic room for maneuver narrowed. Academic and cultural boycotts spread. Scientific partnerships became more fragile. Public debate across Europe and North America grew more polarized. Israel demonstrated military superiority while steadily losing ground in the struggle for international legitimacy.

This erosion is no longer merely a matter of perception. Recent polling points to declining support for Israel in countries where public opinion had already turned negative, including the United States and Germany. For the first time in decades,

Americans express no greater sympathy for Israelis than for Palestinians. The Anholt–Ipsos Nation Brands Index has placed Israel at or near the bottom of the countries it assesses for two consecutive years. At the same time, the International Criminal Court's arrest warrants for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant have reinforced the country's growing diplomatic isolation.

This paradox captures one of the defining realities of the 21st century: military strength remains indispensable, but it is no longer sufficient.

For most of modern history, states measured power by armies, territory, industrial production and economic output. Those assets remain essential in an increasingly unstable world, as Russia's war in Ukraine and Iran's regional ambitions continue to demonstrate.

But strategic competition now extends well beyond the battlefield.

The concept of soft power has shaped international relations for more than 30 years. Yet in Israel, it is still too often reduced to public diplomacy – a question of messaging rather than national strategy. In reality, countries compete not only for territory but also for talent, investment, trust and enduring partnerships.

Universities, hospitals, cultural and sporting institutions, technology companies and philanthropic foundations increasingly shape a country's international influence. Governments cannot simply command that influence. It grows when talented people choose to study, collaborate, invest and create within a country's institutions.

Here, Israel possesses one of its greatest strategic assets. The country is widely known as the "Startup Nation," but innovation is only part of a much larger story. Institutions such as the Technion and the Weizmann Institute rank among the world's leading research centers. Hospitals such as Sheba and Ichilov are internationally recognized for medical innovation and humanitarian expertise. Israeli scientists, entrepreneurs, artists, filmmakers and athletes reach audiences far beyond the country's borders.

Together, these institutions form an ecosystem that gives Israel a global reach far greater than its size would suggest. It is precisely this ecosystem that today's boycotts, diplomatic isolation, and declining public support threaten.

Yet the picture is not entirely bleak. Columbia University recently announced the opening of its Tel Aviv Global Center to deepen collaboration in science, technology, entrepreneurship, and medicine, despite having become a symbol of anti-Israel campus protests. Nor is Columbia alone. MIT has expanded its Kalaniyot program, more than doubling the number of Israeli scholars on campus. Together, these developments suggest that even amid political polarization, Israeli institutions remain highly valued research partners.

Israel also possesses a less recognized advantage: its institutions are connected to one of history's oldest and most globally dispersed communities. For centuries, Jewish communities built schools, universities, hospitals, charitable organizations, and philanthropic networks across the world. After the establishment of the State of Israel, many of these institutions became intertwined with Israeli ones, creating a far-reaching network of scientific, educational, cultural, medical and civic cooperation.

Few countries benefit from a worldwide network that predates the state and continues to reinforce it. Such networks rarely collapse overnight. They erode gradually as partnerships weaken, exchanges diminish and trust declines.

Unlike countries whose soft power rests primarily on culture, technology or higher education, Israel's influence emerges from the interaction between a sovereign state and Jewish communities worldwide. This is not merely soft power. It is institutional and network power – the capacity to build relationships and generate forms of cooperation that others value and need.

This is why Israel must rethink its understanding of power.

For years, discussions about Israel's international position have focused on public diplomacy. Every setback abroad prompts renewed calls for better messaging. Communication matters. But communication cannot substitute for strategy.

Countries admired for scientific excellence first build outstanding universities. Countries respected for innovation first cultivate entrepreneurs and researchers. Countries trusted during humanitarian crises first establish world-class hospitals.

Reputation follows performance. Institutions earn credibility long before governments communicate it.

That lesson has become especially important since October 7, 2023. Israel's understandable focus on immediate security has reinforced its traditional emphasis on military strength, and rightly so. But the past three years have also shown that military success alone cannot secure the country's long-term international position. In some cases, military action may deepen the diplomatic isolation it is intended to prevent.

Scientific cooperation, educational exchange, technological leadership, cultural creativity, humanitarian engagement and strong ties with Jewish communities abroad are not luxuries reserved for peaceful times. They strengthen the economy, reinforce diplomacy, attract talent and create partnerships that become especially valuable during periods of crisis.

They are part of national security.

Israel therefore needs a broader understanding of grand strategy. The country built one of the world's most sophisticated military establishments because successive governments understood that security required sustained investment, institutional capacity, and long-term planning.

The same strategic mindset must now guide investment in universities, research, culture, humanitarian institutions and the organizations connecting Israel with Jewish communities around the world. That means more than increasing budgets. It means protecting research partnerships from short-term political pressures, expanding scientific and cultural exchange, investing consistently in humanitarian cooperation and creating durable mechanisms through which Israeli and diaspora institutions can plan and act together.

These areas should not be treated as separate policy portfolios. They form a single strategic ecosystem. Strong universities generate discoveries. Discoveries attract investment. Investment fuels innovation and strengthens resilience. Culture broadens international familiarity. Philanthropy sustains education and research. Together, they create influence greater than the sum of their individual parts.

This perspective should also change how Israel views its relationship with world Jewry. Too often, that relationship is framed primarily in terms of political advocacy or philanthropy. In reality, Israel and Jewish communities together constitute a uniquely extensive network of knowledge, education, entrepreneurship,

medicine and civic leadership. Preserving and strengthening those ties is not simply a communal responsibility. It is a strategic imperative.

The international system has already been transformed. Strategic competition now encompasses AI, biotechnology, cybersecurity and technological leadership alongside conventional military power. The countries that shape this new era will combine the ability to defend themselves with the ability to attract exceptional talent, investment and enduring partnerships.

Israel already possesses many of these advantages. The challenge is to protect them, strengthen them, and treat them as strategic assets rather than as byproducts of national success.

For 78 years, Israel has treated deterrence as a national imperative. The decades ahead will require it to pursue attraction with comparable determination. Military superiority will remain essential for survival. But lasting influence will depend on whether Israel remains an indispensable partner in science, innovation, education, culture, medicine and humanitarian engagement.

In the 21st century, the strongest countries will not simply be those that defeat their enemies. They will be those that others cannot afford to do without.

ESSAY 59

AI Will Not Change the Jews – Or Will It?

The Jerusalem Post Printed Edition, 19/8/2026, page 10.
The Jerusalem Post, 23/8/2026. https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-906301

At a recent Deloitte event, "The AI Bottom Line," Ilan Birnfeld, chairman and CEO of Deloitte Israel, made an observation that stayed with me. "Artificial intelligence (AI)," he argued, "will not change us as human beings. But it will completely change our companies."

As I listened, I wondered what would happen if we replaced “company” with “the Jewish people.”

AI may not change what it means to be Jewish. But it could profoundly change the institutions through which Jewish life has been transmitted from one generation to another. And once those institutions change, can the people they sustain really remain unchanged?

Birnfeld’s point about companies is more radical than the familiar argument about efficiency. If AI allows an employee to complete in 10 minutes something that previously took three hours, the important question is not simply how much time has been saved. It is why the company should continue organizing itself around a task that once required three hours.

AI therefore forces organizations to reconsider not simply how people work, but what particular jobs, hierarchies, and institutions are for.

The Jewish world should begin asking the same question.

How AI can impact Jewish life

Take Jewish education. For centuries, meaningful access to Jewish knowledge depended heavily on access to people. You needed a teacher to learn Hebrew, a rabbi to guide you through religious texts, a scholar to explain Jewish history. Geography mattered enormously. So did language, money, and the accident of being born into a community large enough to provide those resources.

AI is beginning to lower those barriers. A Jewish child in a small community without a Hebrew teacher can have a private AI tutor available every day. Someone who has never studied Aramaic can ask for an explanation of a passage of Talmud, compare interpretations, and then ask follow-up questions. A secular Israeli curious about Maimonides can enter that intellectual world without entering a yeshiva. Jewish texts that were once accessible mainly to specialists can increasingly be approached by almost anyone.

This does not make the teacher or rabbi obsolete. It does something more interesting: it changes what we need them for.

If information and explanation become abundant, the value of the teacher increasingly lies elsewhere: judgment, interpretation, intellectual discipline, example, and human relationship. Abundance, after all, does not guarantee reliability. The question shifts from "Who has the knowledge?" to "Whose judgment do I trust?"

The same disruption may reach one of the foundations of Jewish identity: memory.

Jewish civilization has placed memory close to the center of collective existence. "*Zakhor*," remember, is not simply an instruction to preserve information. Jewish civilization repeatedly transforms memory into obligation.

Now imagine a Jewish teenager 20 years from now conversing with an AI system built around a verified archive of thousands of hours of Holocaust survivor testimony. She does not simply watch a recorded interview. She asks questions. The system answers on the basis of the words, experiences, and historical record left behind by those who are no longer alive.

There is enormous educational potential here. But there must also be a clear boundary.

AI should help us interrogate testimony; it should never be permitted to manufacture testimony.

The distinction is fundamental. A survivor's recorded words belong to history. A plausible sentence generated by an algorithm but never spoken by that survivor does not. The temptation to make memory more vivid could inadvertently make it less truthful.

For the Jewish people, that danger is particularly acute. We have spent generations documenting the past precisely because historical truth matters. AI should make archives more accessible, searchable, and conversational. It should not turn the dead into fictional characters capable of saying things they never said.

In the age of AI, "*Zakhor*" will therefore require something additional: remember honestly.

This may be where Birnfeld's corporate analogy becomes uncomfortable.

When AI can perform functions that once justified particular jobs, companies must ask what those jobs are actually for. Jewish institutions will increasingly face the same test. If knowledge, translation, and even sophisticated interpretation become instantly available, what exactly are the institutions that once provided them for?

Consider relations between Israel and Jewish communities in Europe. Language remains one barrier separating Jewish worlds. Israelis inhabit a Hebrew political and cultural universe that many Diaspora Jews encounter only indirectly, while Jewish communities across Europe conduct debates that most Israelis rarely hear.

Increasingly seamless translation can lower that barrier dramatically. A Jew in Berlin may be able to follow an Israeli television debate naturally in German; an Israeli may listen to a Dutch Jewish communal discussion in Hebrew. “But translation solves access, not shared experience.”

An Israeli and an Italian Jew can understand every word the other says and still experience October 7, antisemitism, Gaza, religion, democracy, or Jewish security in profoundly different ways. AI can remove the linguistic wall. It cannot determine which questions Jews consider important, much less make them agree on the answers.

And then there is the institution AI may find hardest to disrupt: the Jewish community itself.

A synagogue distributes knowledge, but that is not why a synagogue exists. Jewish communities teach, organize, and communicate, but those functions do not exhaust their purpose.

Their deeper purpose is belonging. An AI can explain the laws of shiva, but it cannot sit beside a mourner. It can teach the prayers, but it cannot make a minyan. It can generate a sophisticated interpretation of the weekly Torah portion, but it cannot accept responsibility for another human being. It can describe Jewish solidarity perfectly. It cannot practice it.

And here the question of trust returns.

Trust is not simply deciding which source provides the most accurate answer. Jewish trust is relational. It is built by showing up, sharing obligations, arguing, remembering, and accepting responsibility for one another. That is a question of relationship, not information.

If a Jewish school understands its purpose principally as transmitting information, AI will challenge it. If a rabbi's authority depends primarily on possessing knowledge unavailable to others, AI will challenge it. If a Jewish organization exists mainly to transmit information between distant communities, AI will challenge it too.

Perhaps that is not something to fear. Perhaps AI's greatest contribution to Jewish life will be forcing Jewish institutions to identify what cannot be automated. And the answer may be surprisingly traditional: presence, responsibility, obligation, and belonging.

For much of Jewish history, Jewish institutions helped solve a problem of scarcity. Books and teachers were scarce. Knowledge of Hebrew and Aramaic was scarce. Communication across continents was difficult. Access to Jewish knowledge depended heavily on where one lived and whom one knew.

We are moving toward the opposite world: one of extraordinary abundance.

The great Jewish question of the AI age may therefore change.

For generations, we asked: How do we give Jews access to Jewish knowledge?

Soon, the harder question may be: Why should they want it?

AI may make it easier than at any previous moment in history to study Judaism, encounter Jewish history, and communicate across the Jewish world. But access is not belonging, information is not memory, and intelligence is not responsibility.

Those still require other human beings.

Perhaps this is the real lesson of Birnfeld's observation. AI will force companies to reconsider the value of human contribution. It may force Jewish institutions to do something even more consequential: rediscover what Jewish community is for.

And the answer to that question, more than the technology itself, may shape the next chapter of the Jewish people.

ESSAY 60

Entering Someone Else's World

The Jerusalem Post Printed Edition, 16/9/2026, page 10.

What Three Cultural Giants Can Teach Us About Finding Common Ground – Opinion, The Jerusalem Post, 24/9/2026. https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-908630

Within a few days in late August, the world learned of the deaths of three giants of global culture: Dolly Parton, Péter Nádas, and Yayoi Kusama.

An American country singer, a Hungarian Jewish novelist, and a Japanese avant-garde artist. There is no obvious reason to place them together. They belonged to different generations, countries, artistic traditions, and cultural worlds.

Yet the news of their deaths arriving within days of one another offers a reminder of something increasingly precious: culture can create common ground – and open a door into unfamiliar worlds – without requiring us to become alike.

I saw this quite literally at a Dolly Parton concert in Toronto in 2016. There were unmistakable groups: men in cowboy-style outfits, a visible Evangelical presence, and large numbers of gay and lesbian fans. Whatever else divided them – politics, religion, sexuality, social background – they all adored Dolly.

For a few hours, Parton created a community among people who might otherwise have had very little to say to one another. She did not resolve their disagreements. She did something more modest and perhaps more valuable: she gave them something they could love together.

I am Jewish. I do not share Parton's Christian faith. But I do not need to share it to understand the image at the heart of her music, that human beings need something that gives them wings and something that keeps their feet on the ground; faith and humility.

Péter Nádas represented a radically different cultural universe. By coincidence, I finished *The End of a Family Story* three days before his death. It is an uneasy book

– difficult, claustrophobic, and unsettling. Nádas was Hungarian and Jewish, and the Jewishness of his writing is integral, not incidental.

In *The End of a Family Story*, family, faith, politics, and memory become entangled with the violent history of 20th century Europe. People inherit worlds they did not choose and histories they cannot simply discard.

What Europe means for Jews

For Jews, and certainly for Israelis, Europe is rarely only a geographical place. It is also memory. Sometimes longing. Sometimes fear. Sometimes culture. Sometimes a family story whose beginning we no longer know and whose ending remains unfinished.

Then there is Yayoi Kusama. I first encountered her work in person on the Japanese island of Naoshima in 2017. I later attended her major retrospective at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art.

Again, the crowd was part of the experience. There were secular Israelis, families with children, and a large, visible group of Arab Israelis. Some had come to see the work of one of the most important artists of the past century. Others were drawn to the mirrors, dots, and pumpkins.

Children seemed delighted by a universe that required no explanation before entering it. Kusama could speak to all of them for entirely different reasons.

That is what great culture can do. It does not require everyone standing before the same painting, reading the same novel, or listening to the same song to understand it in precisely the same way. It creates common ground without demanding uniformity.

That ability feels particularly valuable now. We are living through a period in which the boundary between culture and politics is becoming increasingly difficult to preserve.

Israelis experience this with particular intensity. They want to know what the singer said about Israel. Whether the writer signed a petition. Whether the artist

supports a boycott. Whether the university severed relations with an Israeli institution. Whether the country voted for us or against us.

These questions are not imaginary. Sometimes they matter enormously.

Since the Hamas-led massacre on October 7, 2023, Israelis have learned that cultural, academic, and artistic institutions that appeared universal can suddenly become places where belonging feels highly conditional.

But allowing politics to become our only language for encountering other societies carries its own danger.

Jewish experience offers another possibility. For centuries, Jews wrote in Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic, Yiddish, Ladino, German, Hungarian, Russian, Polish, and English. They borrowed melodies, literary forms, philosophical ideas, and languages from the societies around them. They participated in surrounding cultures while stubbornly refusing to disappear inside them.

That tension between belonging and particularity became one of the great creative forces of Jewish life. Israel should understand this better than most. The Jewish state was not created so that Jews could stop encountering the world. It gave Jews a sovereign home from which to encounter it.

That distinction matters today. Israel sometimes feels extraordinarily alone. Its relationship with parts of the cultural world has become strained. Israelis arrive at international encounters wondering whether they will be welcomed as individuals or judged first by the passport they carry.

The understandable response is to retreat. To stop listening. To divide everything between those who are with us and those who are against us. We should resist that temptation.

The cowboys, Evangelicals, gays, and lesbians in Toronto did not become one another when Parton walked onto the stage. The secular Israelis, Arab Israelis, and families with children in Tel Aviv did not need to experience Kusama in the same way. Nádas did not make the contradictions of Jewish and European history disappear; he turned them into literature.

Perhaps that is what these three artists, whose deaths entered the news so unexpectedly close together, have in common.

Great culture does not erase the boundaries between people. Nor does it require agreement. It gives us permission to cross into unfamiliar territory, to become curious about lives unlike our own, and even to discover something of ourselves there.

Three artists. Three distinct worlds. And three reminders that sharing a culture does not require sharing politics, a religion, or a history.

Conclusion

The Work of Repair

I began this collection believing that the relationship between Europe, Israel, and the Jewish people needed defending. Writing it has convinced me that it needs something more difficult: repair.

Defense asks us to explain why a relationship matters. Repair requires us to acknowledge what has gone wrong, including on our own side, and decide that the relationship matters enough to act.

Much has gone wrong.

The period since October 7, 2023, has exposed profound differences between Israel and parts of Europe. War has intensified disagreements over Gaza, international law, settlements, Palestinian statehood, arms exports, trade, and the limits of pressure on Israel. Antisemitism has risen across the continent, and Israeli distrust of European governments and institutions has deepened. Academic and cultural boycotts have moved from slogans into the daily experience of Israeli scholars, artists, students, and institutions. Israel, in turn, has sometimes treated Europe as a single political actor or embraced political forces whose support should not blind Israelis and Jews to what their agendas may mean for European pluralism.

These essays contain plenty of disagreement, disappointment, and anger.

Yet writing them has taught me something else.

Our political language has become inadequate to describe the relationship itself.

Governments quarrel. Foreign ministers issue statements. EU institutions adopt resolutions. Israeli politicians accuse Europe of hypocrisy or hostility. European politicians speak as though Israel were no more than its current government. Social media magnifies every dispute until a policy disagreement becomes evidence of an allegedly unbridgeable civilizational divide.

Yet beneath this noise, another relationship between Europe and Israel endures.

It lives in the laboratories where Israeli and European scientists work together, and in universities, businesses, technology companies, cultural institutions, airports, and research networks. It lives in the hundreds of thousands of Israelis who travel, study, and invest in Europe, acquire European citizenship, read its literature, follow its football, and imagine parts of their lives there. It lives in Europeans who visit, work with, study, and care about Israel. Above all, it lives in Jewish communities whose daily experience blurs the boundaries our political vocabulary draws between "Europe," "Israel," and "the Jewish people."

These are not three sealed worlds. They overlap.

That should change how we understand the crisis. Deteriorating political relations are serious, but they do not mean the relationship itself has disappeared. Its foundations run deeper than the diplomatic crisis of the moment. That is why repair remains possible.

Repair, however, requires changes on all sides.

Israel must distinguish Europe from the governments, EU institutions, and political movements with which it disagrees. A hostile minister is not an entire country. A statement from Brussels does not speak for every European, just as no Israeli government speaks for every Israeli. Reducing Europe to its most antagonistic voices is intellectually lazy and strategically damaging. It encourages Israel to abandon precisely those constituencies with which sustained engagement matters most.

Israel must also choose its friends more carefully. Support matters, especially when the country faces isolation and hostility, but it cannot be the only test of whether a European political movement is good for the Jews. A party may wave an Israeli flag while advancing a vision of Europe that is intolerant, ethnonationalist, or hostile to minorities. Jewish history should make us particularly skeptical of affection that depends on Jews serving someone else's ideological purpose.

Europe has its own work to do.

Europe must recover the distinction between holding Israel accountable and holding Israelis or Jews collectively responsible for its actions. Israeli governments must be open to scrutiny, opposition, and pressure. Jewish history does not place Israel beyond political judgment. But challenging a government's decisions

is profoundly different from requiring an Israeli academic, Jewish student, artist, athlete, or community to answer for them.

That boundary touches a question running throughout this collection: whether Europe can accommodate living Jews as well as Jewish memory.

Europe has done much to remember the Jews it lost. Memorials, museums, ceremonies, educational programs, and official commemorations have made the destruction of European Jewry part of the continent's moral consciousness. That achievement should never be dismissed.

But the real test of contemporary Europe is not only how it remembers dead Jews. It is how it lives with living ones.

Living Jews are complicated. They disagree and have political identities. Many feel connected to Israel, though that connection takes many forms. Some support Israeli governments; others oppose them. Some are religious, others secular. They define their Jewishness nationally, culturally, religiously, or in combinations that resist easy categorization.

A pluralistic Europe must accommodate that complexity without demanding political declarations as the price of belonging.

Here, too, the Jewish People Policy Institute has a role. Strengthening the Jewish people requires thinking about Israel and Diaspora communities together. Jewish continuity and prosperity depend in part on the quality of their relationships. Europe is central to that task: it contains important Jewish communities, remains one of Israel's most consequential political and economic partners, and is part of the historical and cultural world from which modern Jewish and Israeli life emerged.

Repair must take place at many levels at once.

It belongs to diplomats and political leaders, but cannot be left to them. Universities must defend academic cooperation even when governments disagree. Jewish communities should be able to maintain connections with Israel without being treated as representatives of its government. Israelis need to understand European societies in all their diversity rather than through caricatures. Europeans must resist making Israel the defining moral test of Jewish

participation in public life. Researchers, journalists, artists, businesspeople, students, civil society organizations, and others must build relationships that survive changes of government.

It also belongs to institutions such as JPPI, whose task is to understand the condition of the Jewish people and find ways to improve it.

That is why these essays took the form of op-eds. Scholarship helps us understand structures, history, institutions, and causality. Policy analysis can identify choices and consequences. Public argument enters a conversation while it is still unfolding. It challenges assumptions, sometimes irritates, occasionally persuades, and insists on engagement.

These essays were never intended as a program for solving every problem between Europe, Israel, and the Jewish people. They were interventions in an ongoing conversation, written in the conviction that withdrawal would itself be a failure.

That conviction has only grown stronger.

Europe, Israel, and the Jewish people do not need to agree. To expect agreement is to misunderstand the depth and complexity of their relationship. Europe is itself an argument among nations, societies, political traditions, and competing visions of the future. Israel is an intensely divided democracy whose citizens disagree on almost every major question confronting it. Jews have argued among themselves for thousands of years.

Agreement cannot be the standard. Engagement can.

The challenge is to preserve a political and intellectual space in which disagreement does not become delegitimization, criticism does not become exclusion, solidarity does not require blindness, and disappointment does not become abandonment.

Everyone has a part in this. Europeans must be able to criticize Israel without excluding Israelis and Jews. Israelis must be able to challenge Europe without declaring it irredeemably hostile. European Jews must be able to participate fully in their societies without having to choose between European belonging and whatever relationship they maintain with Israel. Israel must recognize that strong,

confident, pluralistic Jewish communities in Europe are integral to the Jewish future.

None of this will be easy. Repair rarely is.

Perhaps the greatest mistake would be to take the damage of recent years as proof that the relationship is over. These essays lead me to the opposite conclusion. The intensity of the argument is revealing. Israelis still care enormously about what Europe thinks of them. European governments and publics devote extraordinary attention to Israel. European Jewish communities continue to negotiate relationships with both. Beneath the anger lies proximity.

Indifference would look very different.

The task is not to recover an imagined golden age of harmony among Europe, Israel, and the Jewish people. There was no such age. Their history contains extraordinary creativity and terrible violence, belonging and exclusion, admiration and resentment, intimacy and catastrophe. Repair does not require forgetting any of this. It requires recognizing that history has left us connected.

Those connections can be neglected or abused, and can cause disappointment and pain. But they can also be cultivated.

When I rejoined JPPI in October 2025 and began these essays, my aim was to strengthen relations among Israel, the Jewish people, and Europe at what seemed a particularly difficult moment. I end this collection more convinced of that mission's necessity than when I began.

Europe, Israel, and the Jewish people do not need to rediscover one another. They have never ceased to be part of one another's stories.

The relationship is too deep to abandon.

Now comes the work of repair.

Can Israel defend itself without turning its back on Europe?

Can Europe criticize Israel without turning against Israelis and Jews?

Since October 7, 2023, war, rising antisemitism, academic boycotts, and polarization have strained ties among Israel, the Jewish people, and Europe. European criticism of Israel has intensified. Jewish communities across the continent increasingly question their place in societies they helped shape. Israelis wonder whether Europe still understands them.

In these 60 essays, Sharon Pardo draws on diplomacy, history, literature, and personal encounters to ask when legitimate criticism becomes discrimination, whether Europe can honor its murdered Jews while making living ones feel unwelcome, and how Israel can stand with Jews abroad while respecting their independence.

Written as part of Pardo's work at the Jewish People Policy Institute (JPPI), this collection questions Europe's treatment of Israel and its own Jewish communities while holding Israel equally accountable for its choices. It explores the historical, cultural, and human bonds that endure despite political estrangement.

Disagreement is not the opposite of a relationship. Indifference is.



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