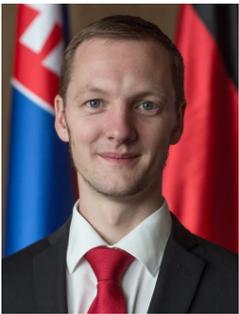




from Josias Terschüren  
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Josias Terschüren

## Reshaping of relations – Before and after elections

With the Israeli elections just over and EU-elections around the corner, EU-Israel relations are facing a democracy-induced reshaping. While the Israeli side of things is likely to stay more or less unchanged and stable with Benjamin Netanyahu having won reelection for his fifth term in office, the outcome of the EU-elections is still an open question. Polls suggest though, that the two largest fractions in the current European Parliament (Christian Democrats and Social Democrats) are poised to lose some 40-50 seats each. With some new alliances forming especially on the right, the next European Parliament will be more diverse and the power and impact of the larger blocs is likely to lessen.<sup>1</sup> What this means for EU-Israel relations remains yet to be seen, but many of the populist parties slated to gain more seats adhere to rather pro-Israel policies. Sebastian Kurz, Viktor Orbán and Matteo Salvini were the first to congratulate Benjamin Netanyahu after his reelection, they share and support many of his policy-approaches and view Israel under him as a natural ally. On the other hand it took German Chancellor Angela Merkel whose government proclaims support of Israel as Germany's "Raison d'état", six days to congratulate Netanyahu and even then her congratulation contained the untimely spice of "advice" on how to solve the Middle East conflict.

If we want to feel the pulse of current EU-Israel relations, we ought to look at the greater picture and into some of the newer developments. There are three current trends, which show some antithetical processes inside EU-Israel relations and deserve a closer look, as they highlight the areas in which the current power struggle takes place:

### EU member states' voting pattern at the United Nations

The Jerusalem Post took it upon itself in December of 2018 to look into the latest voting records of EU member states at the UN pertaining to Israel-related resolutions and has found an alarming pattern: While EU member states have cast individual votes in the past, as they saw fit on Israel-related resolutions, with some EU countries voting against or at least abstaining on oftentimes anti-Israel biased resolutions at the United Nations – recent examples for this include the anti-Trump Jerusalem resolution in December 2017 with six EU countries abstaining or the resolution to approve non-state Palestine as chair over the UN's biggest bloc of developing countries, where nine EU countries abstained – the latest UN-votes show the EU voting en bloc, collectively supporting anti-Israel resolutions. The author of the Jerusalem Post piece Jenny Aharon concluded: *"There is one plausible explanation for the latest EU voting behavior: Brexit, Poland's PiS and Hungary's Fidesz governments are all subjects that divide the EU. The elites are trying to tackle them and overcome those issues. On the matter of foreign policy, EU member states have many disagreements on a number of subjects, but Germany has decided that Israel will no longer be one of them. In other words, there will be no support for Israel coming from any EU state on the international stage unless Germany says otherwise."*<sup>2</sup>

Despite this trend, its mirror image also exists, which leads to the conclusion, that this issue is everything but carved in stone.

1 <https://www.politico.eu/2019-european-elections/>

2 <https://www.jpost.com/Opinion/German-prevention-of-EU-support-for-Israel-echoed-at-the-UN-572616>



## Growing East-West chasm in Europe

Israel's most reliable allies on European soil have historically been from Eastern Europe, above all the Czech Republic and Romania, but also the other states of the so-called Visegrád four (V4: Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary). As already mentioned above, these countries showed courage by disregarding European bloc-discipline for a more favorable stance towards Israel. Especially Poland and the Baltic countries, who are facing rising threats at their eastern borders with Russia are aligning themselves with US-foreign policy concerning the Middle East and Israel in particular, in the hope of receiving security guarantees against Russia. Poland for example is lobbying for a US-base on its territory and just co-hosted the Warsaw Summit in February together with the United States, which was planned to address one issue in particular: Iran.

After Germany, France and the UK unveiled their redundant "Instex" special purpose vehicle in order to potentially circumvent US-sanctions on Iran (some say even the sanctions on Russia!) and voiced some reservations concerning the goal of the Warsaw Summit, the agenda was watered down, last minute.<sup>3</sup> But the chasm between Eastern and Western Europe on issues pertaining to Israel and the Middle East was still on full display, as was the growing estrangement between Western Europe and the United States and Israel.

According to Reuters the EU-reasoning went like this: *"EU diplomats said there was a risk that a two-day conference in Poland in February focused on the Middle East, particularly Iran, convened by U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, could divide eastern and western Europe."* Furthermore they were pretending, that participation at the Summit could force the Iranian Regime *"into the abyss and deepen an arms race in the Middle East."*<sup>4</sup>

Thus, leading Western European states were represented on a hierarchically low level in Warsaw. EU-Foreign-Policy-Chief Federica Mogherini didn't show up at all, while Germany and France dispatched career diplomats only, not their Foreign Ministers. German Under-State Secretary Niels Annen even came to Warsaw directly after participating at a celebration marking 40 years of the Iranian Islamic Revolution at the Iranian embassy in Berlin – thereby sending a non-chalant and starkly undiplomatic signal towards Germany's allies in the US, the Arab world and Israel.

This chasm between Eastern Europe and Western Europe concerning foreign policy is of strategic importance concerning EU-Israel relations – if all EU-member states would submit to current German-Franco policies of mostly nice talk, but antithetical actions towards Israel, the Jewish state would be deprived of its traditional Eastern European allies' support in the international arena.

## Derailing the peace plan before it's even unveiled

The last trend pertains to the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians. With the Trump administration's peace plan to be unveiled in the coming months

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2019-02-13/america-wants-to-talk-about-iran-but-europe-doesn-t>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear-eu-insight/europes-patience-with-iran-wears-thin-tiptoes-toward-trump-idUSKCN1PC2AE>



and with unprecedented steps of benevolence towards Israel by him, be it the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, of the Golan Heights as belonging to Israel or the retraction of the term "occupied Palestinian territory" from State Department official documents, the EU is bracing for impact.

Their tool of choice seems to be political propaganda, even downright lies. In several articles, opeds and interviews, European diplomats and politicians try to take pre-emptive action against Trump's so far unknown "Deal of the century". The brazenly distorted op-ed by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, is telling,<sup>5</sup> as is the statement by 37 former European heads of state and foreign ministers published in the Guardian<sup>6</sup> or the statement by eight European countries at the United Nations Security Council<sup>7</sup> – all point into the same direction: The EU behaves as if it was the mouthpiece of the Palestinians. Not only is it lavishing money on them, but parallelly it's defending them politically by undercutting the US peace plan and recent moves like the recognition of the Golan Heights,<sup>8</sup> a good counter-narrative on this subject can be found here.<sup>9</sup>

European talk uses all the same language: Their core demand is recognition of "1967 borders", an utopian term, as in 1967 they were no borders, those were armistice lines from Israel's war of independence in 1949, never internationally recognized borders. And they dogmatically cling to the two-state-solution, as the only possible solution, all the while they acknowledge, that it is basically dead! (Read Mogherini's op-ed!)

Europe is openly partial in the Middle East conflict, as is America, but while the US tries to break free from an often-tried and never working set of principles and dogmas in order to bring forth a new approach towards a substantial and truthful peace-agreement – taking into consideration the miraculous emergence of relations between Israel and the Arab world. The EU on the other hand is in denial about it, clings to the old order and forgoes Israel, the only democratic country with the rule of law in the Middle East. In doing so Europe ends up on the wrong side of history and in bad company: With the Palestinian Authority under Abbas, who refuses to give up the policy of pay for slay, with which he financially rewards home-grown terrorists and with the Iranian Regime, which wants to eradicate Israel and the Jewish people. Michael Oren, Deputy Minister at the Israeli Prime Minister's office sums it up well:

"When eight EU countries say the American peace plan is doomed to failure if it does not meet their criteria, they mean that they will cause it to fail if the plan does not adopt the Palestinian position."

"Then they wonder why they are irrelevant to the negotiation process," Oren added, "and why Israel cannot rely on them."<sup>10</sup>

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5 <https://www.thecairoreview.com/essays/keeping-the-hope-of-peace-alive/>

6 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/apr/14/europe-must-stand-by-the-two-state-solution-for-israel-and-palestine>

7 <https://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Eight-EU-states-warn-Trump-peace-plan-will-fail-unless-based-on-1967-lines-574737>

8 [https://twitter.com/eu\\_eas/status/1118181339633680384](https://twitter.com/eu_eas/status/1118181339633680384)

9 <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/vivian-bercovici-critics-of-trumps-golan-heights-order-need-to-brush-up-on-facts>

10 <https://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Eight-EU-states-warn-Trump-peace-plan-will-fail-unless-based-on-1967-lines-574737>