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CAN ISRAEL EVER TRUST EUROPE?

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Initial Support for an Ideal Israel

One cannot comprehend present European-Israeli relations without devoting substantial time to analyzing their history. In order to understand how the future links between Europe and Israel can develop in a more harmonious way, it is first necessary to look at how the roads of Europe and the Jews have crossed in the past.

The European position toward Israel has changed substantially over the decades. After Israel became independent in 1948, many Europeans were enthusiastic because they saw in it the realization of an ideal state. They thought that it was a replay of the American revolt against Britain which led to U.S. independence. A second not less important reason for the positive attitude of many Europeans toward Israel derived from the shock of the Holocaust.

Yet this attitude, unrealistic from the beginning, had to change. The dream of the ideal state was impossible to sustain. Israel refused to be the only

vegetarian state in a world of predators. The sudden increase in Arab wealth as a result of the inept way the West treated the oil crisis in 1973 led to a further European reappraisal of Israel's relative value. A third factor was the conjunction of Arab and communist propaganda against Zionism. A fourth factor involved Israel's ties with the United States or, in leftist propaganda terms, American imperialism.

The central thread running through European attitudes toward Jews — and today toward Israel — consists of long-held historical prejudices, complexes and frustrations. Antisemitism has not disappeared, it was simply broadened to include anti-Zionism.

Jews as Traditional Outsiders

Today's united Europe may be seen as a modern version of the Holy Roman Empire, in which Jews always were strangers — first because they were not pagans, and later because they were not

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Christians.

This same European perception of the Jews as barbarians returned in later centuries, now as strangers from outside Europe. When the Jews were exiled from Spain at the end of the fifteenth century, many fled to the Ottoman empire. There they played an important diplomatic role and actively assisted the Turks against Europe. In the sixteenth century, a Jewish Ottoman minister, Josef of Naxos, even laid siege to the Italian city of Ancona to help the Jewish community there.

To many Europeans, Jews remain strangers to this day. To be an American Jew today is a legitimate way of being an American even if it is perhaps not the best way to be so in the eyes of that country's majority. For the Europeans, however, the perception of the Jew has remained that of a stranger, more so after World War II and the creation of Israel.

Unrelenting Antisemitism

The predominant historical stereotype of the Jew in the eyes of the modern European is that of antisemitism, a word invented in 1874 by Wilhelm Marr, a German journalist and parliamentarian. This European attitude has profound motives. Jews have on many occasions been the test case of failed European ideas and ideals. The Dreyfuss case, ending with the condemnation of the innocent officer simply because he was Jewish, both symbolized and demonstrated the failure of the European enlightenment.

Jews also symbolize the European left's failure. They have shown the ideology's inherent contradictions and the contradictions between its ideology and practice. For some of its precursors in the nineteenth century, such as the Frenchmen Proudhon and Fourier, the Jew and the banker are the same. According to a popular syllogism: since the Jew has the money and money dominates the world, the Jew dominates the world.

The second International and Lenin officially rejected antisemitism, but that did not change the rank-and-file prejudice against Jews in the communist camp as shown, for example, by the 1952 Slansky trial in Czechoslovakia and the "doctor's plot" engineered by Stalin in 1953.

Marxist antisemitism has had a profound impact on the European left. It accepted the principle that Third World peoples were by definition proletarian, while Israel was "an imperialist stooge." Communism, which claimed that it had immunized itself against antisemitism, did not raise its voice against the delegitimation of Israel as a state by the Palestinian National Charter.

It did worse than that when it used the whole arsenal of antisemitic weaponry against Zionism. Thus it upheld the principle, wrongly attributed to Hegel, that when facts do not agree with ideology they should be discarded. The left and its opponents each had contrasting stereotypes: on the one hand, that of the rich Jews; on the other, those of the subversive anarchists, God's killers and world conspirators.

Jews have been both the promoters and victims of European nationalism. For those familiar with the history of modern Italy, it is striking that between 1835 and 1870 the Jews were, together with the family of Savoia, who later would become kings of Italy, the main supporters of the Italian Risorgimento, the fight for Italian unity.

Israel Implements European Ideas

People who demonstrate, through no fault of their own, the failure of the ideas of others are unlikely to be loved by those whose ideological balloons they have deflated. Israel continues the Jew's traditional role as test case for the failure of European ideas.

Israel is effectively dealing with many problems Europe has difficulty facing, let alone solving. So, for instance, Israel confronts the challenge of integrating immigrants with reasonable success. Proportionately, it has absorbed more Third World immigrants into a Western-style society than any other country. Europe has a lot of good and bad experience in dealing with immigrants, but it lacks an adequate approach to the integration of non-Europeans.

It is subconsciously difficult for many Europeans to accept that Israel is dealing in a realistic way with the return of the "sacred" into politics, in the ongoing struggle between theocracy and democracy. Israel struggles constantly with the dilemmas of a national state based on both territory and religion.

In this respect, it is the only country in the Middle East in which democracy and theocracy coexist, so far, without brutal confrontation between them. Yet it seems difficult for the Europeans to appreciate the universal value of an experience which no Third World country has been able to develop peacefully.

This is an issue of vital importance for contemporary international society. The element of the "sacred," which the French Revolution expelled from European politics, is returning in various ways with a vengeance in Europe. One example is Bosnia, which was part of a territorial national state and now is divided into religious enclaves. Other examples may follow in due course.

Even worse, Israel has shown in the 45 years of its history how an underdeveloped country can modernize, whereas many of the former European colonies are collapsing. This is another irritant for European leaders, though this is never explicitly said.

During its first years of independence, Israel embodied the only viable messianic socialist state in history, based on solidarity and voluntarism. There are many examples in European history where attempts to establish such states failed, among them: Bavaria and Hungary after World War I, and the republican regime in Spain.

One cannot be liked by the leaders of Europe's leftist parties while rubbing them in the face with successes on issues where they have miserably failed.

The Crisis Between State and Nation

Israel may even solve another test Europeans have major problems confronting: the crisis between state and nation. The Italian nation today has difficulties maintaining the Italian state. The Basques do not want to be part of the Spanish nation. We are seeing an ongoing breakdown of the Belgian nation. The United Kingdom is in the process of becoming disunited. The disintegration of Yugoslavia is the worst example, all the more so considering that the European Community has actively encouraged its breakup.

Now, while most European countries cannot solve the problem, in Israel the state may create a nation from what is still to a large extent a state made up of Jewish tribes. These tribes, in spite of what Zionists like to believe, have not much of a common language or historical experience. Their language, Hebrew, started out mainly as an Esperanto.

Still, these tribes have created a state which most likely is creating an Israeli nation. Paradoxically, much of the merit goes to the Arabs. They have forced Israeli society to maintain a unity in the face of hostility. Other societies have experienced external pressure, but they have not been able to translate this into creative internal unity. The case of European states faced by Soviet danger comes to mind. If Israel is not a miraculous example, it is at least spectacular.

Winning Where Europeans Fail

To make matters continuously worse in the eyes of the Europeans, Israel is a modern victorious state, whereas they themselves would have been defeated in World War II by an ideology of darkness had it not been for the military efforts of two nations that the Europeans regard as rather uncivilized — the Americans

and the Russians.

The image of Israel in European eyes is thus a very confusing one. One of its stereotypes is as an emanation of Europe, both colonialist and imperialist. It has been absurdly branded by the United Nations as "the result of the creation of a racist movement."

According to a certain type of European historical determinism, a state with such an image should lose wars against the Third World Arabs the same way the Europeans lost their colonies. No Western power has been able to withstand wars of liberation, as the Indian, Indonesian, Algerian and Vietnamese cases seem to prove. In the case of Israel, many Europeans — obviously not all of them — who start with such a false premise are very disappointed if this in practice does not lead to the expected false conclusion.

Europe and the Middle East

The prostration of the Europeans in front of the Arabs in the 1970s and 1980s because of their oil wealth has blinded them to the dangers of justifying terrorism, mainly of Arab origin. Despite the facts, Israel was blamed for many of the West's major problems.

The United Nations, in one of its many perverse statements, declared Israel the main danger to world peace and the Middle East conflict the most serious one at the end of the century. Israel was also blamed by its Western detractors for the entrance of Russian influence in the Middle East and Chinese influence into Africa to balance the success of Israeli cooperation policies.

Nowadays, the castle of mixed European, Arab, communist, and United Nations lies has collapsed in an embarrassing way, resulting in a paradox. Israel, which was accused of threatening peace, is there, for everybody to see, as a major ally in the world fight against Moslem terrorism.

A unilateral Israeli withdrawal from Gaza would endanger many Arab regimes much more than Israel does. What would be seen as a fundamentalist victory over the "Zionist monster" would immensely enhance the fanatics' prestige in the eyes of the Arab masses. For the first time, the political and business establishments of the Arab world have a common enemy with Israel — the Moslem fundamentalists.

The ruling Arab classes have a common interest with Israel to solve the Palestinian problem in order not to allow the radical religious fundamentalists to enhance their position further. In the meantime Europe seems unable to contribute much to the two sides in the

Middle East, who can negotiate for peace without it. To the contrary, it fuels the Middle East conflict, competing with the United States in the sale of weapons.

Europe's ongoing commercial ties with Iran are prime evidence that European governments have not learned much from the past, although they could easily bring the Iranians to reason by cutting purchases of their oil and thus strengthening their Arab allies.

The Route Through Israel to Asia

Israel is the only modern state halfway between Washington and Peking. This has many implications and creates multiple opportunities. Until a new satellite was launched recently, there has been in Herzliya a TV satellite farm which supplied TV stations all over the world with recordings from central Asian stations. Now that the technical obstacles have been overcome, Israel's location has ceased to give it an edge in this field, but others have in the meantime opened up.

Because of the political changes in Eastern Europe, a sort of new silk road has opened up for Israel to India and China. One immediate result has been that the EC has located in Jerusalem a center for gathering economic information on the Moslem republics of the former Soviet Union and northern China. Israel is one of the few countries with technicians and economic experts capable of understanding the various dialects spoken.

If Peace Comes

While there may or may not be peace, if peace comes it will not be a lengthy process. It will have rapid, explosive results. Many foreign companies will open offices in Israel. Israel will fast become an international business center.

In a true partnership Israel must be very careful not to see itself as a potential new Venice, the Italian state which for many centuries was only interested in developing commerce. Money is not the only thing that counts. Israel should not act in the Middle East with such European egoistic neomercantilism. Rather it should see itself as an integral part of the Middle East.

Undoing the Venice Declaration

The European community has in the past made many hostile declarations against Israel and even threatened it occasionally with sanctions. It is symbolic that the best-known of these declarations was one made in — of all places — Venice in 1980. In it, Europe tried to impose its nonexistent strength on Israel to please the Arabs.

The declaration of Venice recognizes the right of the Palestinian Arabs to a homeland, undermining the position of Jordan, at that time still the legal authority of the Palestinians. They "forgot" totally to mention Jordan in the Venice declaration, thus delegitimizing a country which had been a reliable European ally.

In the Venice declaration Europe rewarded the PLO for terrorism at a time when it refused to accept the existence of Israel. Europe presented ultimatums to Israel without having the strength to guarantee its defense in compensation. The Europeans did not even support the only peacemaking event in the Middle East — the Camp David agreements.

Europe has until today not renounced its Shylock policy. It wants from Israel a pound of flesh in territorial concessions without giving any attention to the damage these cause to the whole body as far as the defense capabilities of Israel are concerned. It is another example of Europe doing itself what it wrongly blamed others of doing. Until Europe officially admits the failure of its Venice policy, Israel cannot even begin to trust Europe.

The Machiavellian Dilemma

Machiavelli said that a Christian prince is a contradiction; either one is a prince or one is a Christian. Not being Christian and not particularly liking princes — such as the former Italian king who, in Mussolini's day, betrayed the Jews — I would not propose that Israel can show Europe a solution for the Machiavellian dilemma. The problem of the Europeans has always been how to be Christians, which in their minds means moral and forgiving, and how at the same time to be princes, which means having state power.

Israel can at least offer some ideas on the Machiavellian dilemma. After peace, Israel's main problem will be how to return to its sacred traditions without throwing away the modernization of which Jews have been major promoters in the last 150 years.

In return for this contribution to modernism, Jews have been paid back by Europe with violent antisemitism. The old Christian version of the hate of Jews has been changed to accusations that Jews corrupted the world through modernism.

Arabs nowadays face a problem which is exactly the opposite of Israel's. They are confronted with the challenge to find ways to modernize quickly without breaking with their very strong traditions. They have so far paid a heavy price of backwardness for their unwillingness to modernize.

A Positive European Role

Europe recently has overcome religious and nationalistic wars and hate which have filled its rivers with blood for four centuries. If Europeans wanted to make a genuine contribution to a stable peace in the Middle East, instead of continuous attempts to meddle in troubled waters which has been the main characteristic of European politics of the past decades, they could distill from their own experience certain useful elements.

The EC should look at itself as the international organization replacing the old European empires, the Habsburg, Czarist Russia and even the Ottoman one, as an economic framework in which the interests of many "tribes" could find accommodation and reasons to cooperate by balancing tradition and modernization.

This may be difficult and surely will be less exciting for the newspaper and TV journalists than what is happening at present. It is, however, certainly a civilized way to compensate for all the damage Europe has done to Israel in the past and create a space in which the two can work together in the future.

There are better European traditions than those established by the Dominican monks in burning the Talmud, or by Napoleon who wanted to civilize Egypt and proclaim a Jewish state to get easier supply for his army. The message of Europe should be that of Eras-

mus: "Rationalism, compassion, moderation and self-criticism, all of which have become scarce commodities in Europe."

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