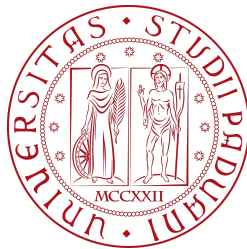


UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI PADOVA

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**Master's degree in
European and Global Studies**



EU-Israel Relations: Navigating the Complex Pathways of Political and Institutional
collaboration from the 1960s to the present

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A chi sempre (ci) ha creduto (in me),

e mi ha supportato,

nonostante tutto.

Gracias.

Shalom, שלום, سلام

TITLE

EU-Israel Relations: Navigating the Complex Pathways of Political and Institutional collaboration from the 1960s to the present

ABSTRACT

This study provides a comprehensive examination of the intricate political and institutional connections between the State of Israel and the European Union, focusing on the period from the 1960s, when negotiations started and the first trade agreement was signed, to the contemporary era. It delves into the roles played by European institutions, specialised committees created to facilitate the political dialogue, e.g., the European Parliament's Delegation for relations with Israel (D-IL) and the Association Council; and key figures in shaping diplomatic discourse and facilitating integration. To unveil the dynamic and occasionally challenging nature of collaboration – that of “integration without membership” of Israel, as defined by Pardo & Peters (2010) -, it navigates historical archives, original documents of European laws and agreements, exchange of letters, communication structures, diplomatic exchanges and political discourses and encounters. This, with the aim of exploring the evolution of key areas of cooperation – primarily economics, trade and R&D and scientific research – and dialogue over time. Furthermore, the research extends its scope beyond a retrospective analysis by incorporating a forward-looking perspective. It seeks to examine potential future trajectories in the relations between the State of Israel and the European Union, drawing on discussions with academic experts. By digging into what might come next, the study aspires to provide detailed insights and perspectives on the evolving nature of collaboration, thereby making a substantive contribution to our comprehensive understanding of the future prospects for diplomatic relations between these entities.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since the creation of the State of Israel, links between the new nation and the European Union have been present. Apart from coinciding the year of its foundation, which occurred in 1948 after the release of the “Declaration of Independence of the State of Israel” by Ben Gurion, with the signature of the Brussels Treaty, officially “Treaty on Economic, Social and Cultural Collaboration and Collective Self-Defence”, which established the Western Union (WU), both entities shared a past marked by World War II and its geopolitical, social, humanitarian and historical consequences, as well as (de)colonisation and the reconfiguration of global alliances. A relation that is possible not only due to their connected past and culture, but also of economic interests and interest in development and progress of all nations involved.

Even if history is perceived as a “source of understanding” and “cultural affinity” for both¹, it is also what leads Israel to distrust the countries in the Union, because of events such as the persecution of Jews, Nazism and WWII; the European Council's Declaration of the Venice Summit of June 1980, perceived as “pro-Palestinian”; and antisemitism in Europe, raising nowadays. Moreover, and also as a consequence of this, Israel and the EU usually (still) differ in their political views², esp., in fields like security and regional cooperation.

However, despite their differences, Israel sustains a series of agreements with the EU, enjoying a “privileged status vis-à-vis”³. The relationship between them could be defined as “integration without membership”⁴, since through these cooperation accords Israel adopts some procedures and norms that are inherent to the EU system, especially for their participation in EU funding programmes. Moreover, both are open to dialogue, which they decided to hold regularly in a structured way. The Association Council, the main instrument for this purpose, is described as the “institutionalisation of an annual dialogue at foreign ministers’ level between Israel and the EU”⁵. This, however, has also suffered from the turbulent relations between both entities, which are frequently affected by the

¹ Du Plessix (2011) assesses.

² See Chapter 1.

³ Du Plessix, 2011.

⁴ As Pardo & Peters (2010) have entitled their work.

⁵ Sion-Tzidkiyahu (2022).

geopolitics of the Middle East area and the relations with neighbouring countries, esp., within the Palestinian territories.

Furthermore, the historical, comprehensive, interdisciplinary, and impartial linkages between both organisations have yet to be thoroughly examined by academics from their origin to the present. Most literature mostly concentrates on Palestine or examines Israel-European Union connections in subsequent years. The initiation of collaboration between organisms often receives scant attention, typically addressed just informally in the introduction or as a component of the background in relevant studies, rather than as the primary focus of study. Also, studies predominantly concentrate on examining the economic and trade interactions between the EEC and Israel, with the utilisation of archive materials being restricted⁶.

The only exception to this tendency is Pardo's article "The Year that Israel Considered Joining the European Economic Community"⁷, which focuses entirely on Shimon Peres' secret meetings with Jean Monnet on Israeli aspirations of gaining full EEC membership, which will be used during the elaboration of this work too. Even if focusing on a narrow time frame, and analysing related historical material just to what mentioned above, the article pictures itself as an insufficient historical review, as early stages of the negotiations are not highlighted.

For this, this Master's thesis responds to the need of making a compilation that focuses on the past, present and future of EU-Israel relationship, in order to objectively analyse the links and potential areas of cooperation, as well as challenges in coordination, political dialogue and diplomatic efforts of the Israeli State with the EU as a supranational institution and representative of European countries' interests as a whole, and the other way around.

Indeed, the present research pursues the goal to explore the political and institutional connections between the State of Israel and the European Union, delving into the role of European institutions, the specialised committees created to facilitate political dialogue; and analyses the key figures who shaped the diplomatic discourse and facilitated integration. It then describes diplomatic actions and exchanges of communications,

⁶ See Heimann, Gadi. (2015). "The Need to be Part of Europe: Israel's Struggle for an Association Agreement with the EEC, 1957–1961." *Israel Studies*, 20(1), 86-109.

⁷ Pardo, Sharon (2013). "The Year that Israel Considered Joining the European Economic Community". *Journal of Common Market Studies* 51, no. 5, 901-915. Wiley Blackwell.

documents and agreements..., to trace the main lines of cooperation and dynamics, in order to build a comprehensive and historical overview up to the present day.

By reconstructing the evolution of such relations, this study aims to reach general conclusions on how European integration of Israel has occurred, if it has, and how it will move forward nowadays, again, if it will. It analyses the objective importance of EU-Israel relations, in economic and political terms, despite ethical concerns at times; as well as their development over time, within a chronological and sectoral focus.

1.1 Research topic and research questions

The main research question this thesis tries to answer is the following:

“In the face of persistent regional and international challenges, how have the political, economic, and diplomatic ties between the European Union and Israel changed, especially since the end of World War II, and what possible future developments might influence their collaboration and integration?”.

Moreover, the work intends to deepen into the following sub-questions:

- “Is collaboration between the EU and Israel solely motivated by economic considerations, or does it represent a more comprehensive strategic and political alignment that endures despite persistent regional tensions and hostility and ethical and moral challenges?”;

Furthermore, in view of stated effective economic cooperation and cultural and historical ties between both entities:

- "How do financial incentives and opportunities for trade and innovation, such as participating part in EU funding schemes like Horizon or Erasmus+, serve to stabilise EU-Israel relations, especially during periods of increased political or regional tension?";
- “Should cultural linkages or ‘cultural affinity’ be present and relevant, how do they lessen the negative effects of perceived hostilities, antisemitism, or previous wars on the EU-Israel partnership?”;

- "To what degree are Israel and the EU eager to make concessions on controversial subjects in order to maintain a mutually beneficial partnership, especially in areas like trade and research and development?"

Finally, focusing on the future of EU-Israel relations, the research pursues to analyse the following inquiries:

- "Can the EU and Israel partner up on key topics like environmental sustainability, technology, and security to address the disputes underlying the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and contribute to stabilising the region?"
- "As a long-term strategy and development, could Israel's current 'integration without membership' status lead to formal EU membership, and what compromises or political, economic, and cultural obstacles would both Israel and the EU have to overcome to achieve such a goal?"

In conclusion, the goal of this study is to explore the economic, political, diplomatic, and cultural aspects of EU-Israel relations in order to better understand their challenges, potentialities and main developments, during the last decades up to the present time. By deepening into the above-described questions, the thesis aims to justify and describe all the main reasons for their collaboration, and state the reliance of their partnership despite difficulties. How strategic, historical, cultural ties influence these constant difficulties, as well as their decisions, will be approached, too; both in the sense of the present, but also future interactions between the two parties. clarify the reasons for their cooperation, how resilient their partnership is to recurring difficulties, and how historical, strategic, and cultural elements influence present and future interactions.

Ultimately, this study seeks to determine if "integration without membership" is a suitable model for their formalised partnership, or whether both entities would advocate for further European integration, or even EU membership, in the years to come, despite (geo)political restraints, among others.

1.2. Methodology

The evolution of their relation in all actual and potential fields of cooperation will be pictured using a complete, multidisciplinary and multidimensional methodology based on historical sources and contemporary analysis. The research design combines literature

review of European, American and Israeli research papers and books, elaborated by the academia, bureaucrats and further experts on the matter; archival research, and analysis of communiqués, agreements and other diplomatic communication tools. These include exchange of letters and public statements, too, at press conferences after the presentation of official documents and diplomatic meetings, but also on social media and modern, 21st century-alike ways of political and diplomatic exchanges.

Within those, as defined above, main EU institutions intervening to promote relations and as a forum of debate between representatives of both parties, as well as key figures in charge of pushing for dialogue, as well as the terms in which cooperation is held and various areas of interest, will be highlighted, analysed and discussed.

Finally, to deepen into the future of the relations, time frame which is not covered by the existing literature or records, short interviews on future possible developments of EU-Israel relations are to be arranged with experts in different professional and academic fields⁸, to be done via online, due to financial and logistical constraints. As history tends to repeat itself, deepening into how the following years will determine EU-Israel relations is extremely interesting for this exhaustive and far-reaching research, especially in light of the new political drift, and a new conflict escalation with Palestine, eternal source of misunderstanding and political, religious and ideal clash; notwithstanding the effective economic, innovation and academic cooperation, among others, between the two parties.

1.3. Chapter structure and chronological framework

To deepen into the historical, chronological evolution of this cooperation scheme, the present work will be divided in 5 different chapters identifying different historical periods divided according to the main development in terms of the advancement, or downgrading, of the relations between both bodies, when it comes to accords, diplomatic moves and political dialogue⁹:

⁸ See Chapter 6 for the conclusions extracted and Annex 1 for their transcriptions. Please acknowledge these will be written in a dialogue way, and include official testimonials of professionals, politicians, diplomats, professors and academic researchers on the field and the present topic. Though they may not be verbatim since they were based on thorough notes made during the interviews rather than audio recordings, transcriptions accurately capture their substance. In order to accurately portray their insights, all interpretations have been preserved, and each interviewer's comments capture individual opinions and viewpoints.

⁹ All this, taking into consideration that, especially in some areas, collaboration and diplomacy is highly affected by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, especially in the second half of the period in which relations were, and are, developed.

Chapter 1, *Building the basis for EEC/EU-Israel relations (1950s-1970s)*, aims to delineate the preliminary measures of EEC-Israel collaboration, highlighting the economic incentives and the significance of early diplomatic interactions and trade accords. It provides a historical analysis of the EEC's receptiveness to collaboration, the evolution of the "Free Trade Area" idea, and Israel's goals for enhanced economic and political relations, including the pursuit of full EEC membership.

Chapter 2, *Disruption and reopening of EEC-Israel relationship (1970s - 1990s)*, examines the growth of EEC-Israel ties in the context of transforming European institutions, emphasising the formation of the EU Council and the European Parliament Delegation for relations with Israel (D-IL), pertinent to our analysis. The text outlines the advancement of free trade in the industrial sector, emphasising the 1975 Agreement, and analyses the impact of the Maastricht Treaty on Israel's ties with the EU, offering a restructured framework for institutional collaboration.

Chapter 3, *From Oslo to the Association Agreement, a peace attempt (1990s - early 2000s)*, addresses the Association Agreement and the establishment of the Association Council, analysing various models and critiques. The text examines the Oslo Accords, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) as frameworks for regional collaboration and advancement. Furthermore, it briefly examines two principal domains of cooperation: research and development, and higher education, establishing a foundation for enhanced EU-Israel collaboration.

Chapter 4, *Closer to EU programmes, further from the institutions and diplomatic relations (2004 - 2013)*, highlights advancements in research and development, innovation, and the renewed focus on energy and environmental sustainability through enhanced collaboration. Despite strengthened relations via projects such as the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), it confronts difficulties like the Gaza conflict, EU enlargement, the discourse on "integration without membership," EU restrictions concerning Israeli territory, and increased apprehensions over human rights.

Chapter 5, *Current relations (2013 - nowadays): turbulent era and attempts at revival*, evaluates the present condition of EU-Israel ties, characterised by political conflicts yet persistent collaborative endeavours. It analyses the obstacles to advancement and the

chances for rejuvenating relationships, providing insights on possible future trajectories and opportunities for the EU-Israel partnership.

Finally, *Conclusions and future prospects* will sum up the results from each chapter, highlighting significant advancements in EU-Israel relations throughout the decades and examining the trends and challenges that influence their present condition. This will investigate possible avenues for future collaboration, taking into account current difficulties and opportunities, especially in economic, research, and sustainability collaborations. This chapter will examine the effects of EU policies on Israel and the surrounding area, providing insights into the potential evolution of these interactions within the shifting political context.

Summarising, by offering a comprehensive historical study that highlights the complex character of their relationship, this thesis seeks to close a major gap in the academic research already available on EU-Israel relations. It goes beyond narrow economic viewpoints to discuss more general political, cultural, and ethical aspects that have impacted both collaboration and diplomatic efforts, and conflict between the two parties.

The study will show how Israel and the EU have managed times of agreement and disagreement, influenced by geopolitical changes, regional tensions with neighbouring countries, and common interests, by looking at the relationship through a chronological lens that is defined by both official documents and testimonials of experts, as well of a personal analysis of the researcher. Therefore, more concretely speaking, the persistent nature of EU-Israel relations and the factors underlying their constant interaction will be addressed by this project through the examination of historical records, agreements, and diplomatic correspondence as well as by the opinions of experts interviewed.

In conclusion, the present research will further our understanding of the advancement of EU-Israel relations, the factors which motivate them, and possible avenues for future cooperation, particularly in view of emerging opportunities and challenges in the context of geopolitical affairs.

1.4. Setting the basis: historical background and characteristics of the relation

The relationship between the EU and Israel from its founding to the present is a prime example of what scholars Pardo and Peters call “integration without membership”¹⁰. Through cooperation agreements, Israel complies with a number of EU laws and regulations, most notably those pertaining to its participation in EU funding programs. Even while there are still differences in areas like regional cooperation and security, Du Plessix asserts that Israel enjoys a unique “privileged status vis-à-vis” the EU¹¹. Both parties benefit from this intricate connection, which is sometimes complex and paradoxical but is made feasible by shared historical, cultural, and economic interests.

About Israel's relationship with the European Union, Maria Grazia Enardu notes that there is a noticeable split in Israeli society about this issue as well. Religious groups usually view Israel as "a people that dwells alone" and are against connections that would jeopardise their sovereignty, whereas secular and moderate Israelis support expanding association agreements with the EU for strategic and economic benefits¹². According to a 2004 study, 85% of respondents had good thoughts about joining the EU, but with a cautious view on official membership, indicating broad interest in the EU¹³. However, the last chapter of this thesis will explore the complicated issue of Israel's future (potential) EU membership.

Michael Mertes characterises the EU-Israel relationship as both constructive and controversial. Subject to an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement, Ambassador Lars Faaborg-Andersen in 2014 suggested a potential special partnership for Israel with enhanced market and security ties. Zionism's emphasis on self-defence and sovereignty contradicts with the EU's "post-national" values, which support negotiation and the

¹⁰ Pardo, Sharon., & Peters, Joel. (2010). *Uneasy Neighbours: Israel and the European Union*. Lexington Books. / Previously mentioned in: Pardo, Sharon. (2009). Integration without Membership: Israel and the European Union. *Contemporary European Studies*, 1(4), 37-57.

¹¹ Du Plessix, Caroline. “The European Union and Israel”. *Bulletin du Centre de recherche français à Jérusalem* 22 (2011). Accessed January 15, 2024. <http://journals.openedition.org/bcrfj/6675>.

¹² Enardu, Maria Grazia. (2014). "Israele e Unione Europea: realtà e illusioni." *Studi Urbinati, A - Scienze Giuridiche, Politiche Ed Economiche*, 56(3), 515–525. <https://doi.org/10.14276/1825-1676.310>

¹³ According to a 2004 study by the Dahaf Institute on behalf of the EU Delegation in Israel, which I. Shahar published in *Maariv*, 85% of Israelis said they would be interested in joining the EU. In particular, 25% of respondents were usually in favour of the notion, while 60% supported an official application for EU membership. / In Enardu, “Israele e Unione Europea”.

transfer of power over force. Mertes relates this contradiction to Israel's European history and shifting demographics¹⁴.

Differing perceptions of dangers can contribute to higher tension. While the EU, which is more focused on promoting peace, usually makes a distinction between the political and military aspects of groups like Hezbollah, Israel sees immediate regional concerns. The EU's ongoing criticism of Israeli settlements and its unilateral recognition of Palestine further erode trust. With Israel's innovative economy serving as a model for Europe, scientific and economic collaboration is still very beneficial, though. Mertes asserts that despite continuous setbacks, the shared technological and security advantages of the EU and Israel sustain their dependency.

In addition to that conversation, Enardu notes that Israel's system grants non-Jews certain rights and duties based on their ethnic and religious identity, which limits their access to services, residence, property rights, and family unity. Politics are heavily influenced by religious organisations, particularly the Orthodox Jewish population, which makes it difficult to amend the laws protecting individual rights. Since these laws are so crucial to Israel's identity as a Jewish and democratic state, especially when it comes to matters that affect its core values, the author claims that Israel would find it extremely difficult to accept an external, supranational authority¹⁵.

Furthermore, Du Plessix emphasises a key distinction between Israel's and the EU's security strategy, expanding on Merte's theory on “differing views of dangers”. Israel's approach is mostly centred on employing military force to target “enemies”, namely Iran, in great contrast to the EU's concentration on economic growth and commitment to law and democracy. This discrepancy may also be observed in the financial priorities: Israel devotes a significant amount of funds to defence, whereas the EU prioritises social cohesion¹⁶.

Mr. Schueftan, Director of the National Security Studies Centre at the University of Haifa, believes that although Israelis accept some European ideas, they do not believe that Europe can effectively uphold them. Although he acknowledges the significant economic ties

¹⁴ Mertes, Michael. (2015). *Uneasy Neighbours: The EU and Israel – A Paradoxical Relationship*. In G. Wahlers (Ed.), *Germany and Israel: 50 Years of Diplomatic Relations* (pp. 39-60). Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.

¹⁵ Enardu, “Israele e Unione Europea”, 2014.

¹⁶ Du Plessix, “The European Union and Israel”, 2011.

between Israel and European countries, he attributes the primary issues in relations to a "conflicting ethos" that results from cultural differences rather than the occupation alone. This "conflicting ethos" strains the otherwise lucrative, primarily trade-related relationship. Additionally, Schueftan draws attention to the growing anti-Israel sentiment in Europe, which is exacerbated by anti-Semitism and the growing power of the Arab-Muslim vote¹⁷.

In this context, Anat Bardi and Lilach Sagiv examine the cultural differences that impact relations between Israel and the EU, noting that whereas the EU values equality, autonomy, and harmony, Israel values hierarchy, embeddedness, and mastery. Using Schwartz's idea of cultural values, they show how these differences impact things like human rights, environmental legislation, and economic progress¹⁸. For instance, whereas Israel's hierarchy and mastery values promote dependence on formal rules and the strategic use of resources, EU cultures place a stronger focus on sustainable development and equality and harmony. According to the authors, Israel's unique approach to environmental exploitation, which frequently deviates from European conservation norms, can also be explained by its low focus on harmony.

As situational variables, including changing demographics, have an impact on values over time, which impacts policy alignment and mutual understanding, Bardi and Sagiv conclude that these cultural disparities may affect how Israel and the EU collaborate in the future.

Yet, Pasatoiu and Nitoiu claim that there is no formal strategic alignment in the relationship, even if the EU views Israel as a strategic partner due to "natural convergence" in cultural, historical, and religious beliefs. Even though the EU depends on Israel's advanced military and intelligence capabilities, it values pragmatic cooperation over "high politics". Multilateral initiatives like the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (1995) and the European Neighbourhood Policy (2004), which will be discussed in further detail in this paper, have mostly failed to advance regional stability¹⁹.

¹⁷ Schueftan, D., and Miller, A.D., "European-Israeli Relations: Structural Problems," *Woodrow Wilson Center*, posted April 17, 2014, YouTube video, 58:21, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sCHEP5ISJd8>.

¹⁸ Bardi, Anat, & Lilach Sagiv. (2003). "The EU and Israel: Comparison of Cultures and Implications." In *Israel and Europe*, edited by Klaus Boehnke, 41–58. Deutscher Universitätsverlag. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-322-81262-9_3.

¹⁹ Pasatoiu, Florin, & Nitoiu, Cristian. (2020). *The EU and Israel as Genuine Strategic Partners*. Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies.

Despite significant cultural and ideological alignment, researchers note that institutional problems and competing political objectives limit the extent of EU-Israel collaboration. They conclude that, in practice, the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) approach prioritises rational, interest-based cooperation, as in the case of Israel, above its normative declarations, favouring sectoral collaboration.

Notwithstanding all this, Giorgio Gomel pointed out that the relationship between the EU and Israel is marked by “ambivalence, mistrust, and at times hostility” on both sides. Europeans often view Israel as advocating “permanent occupation... and a de facto annexation of Palestinian territories”, ignoring Palestinian rights. Israelis, meanwhile, view the EU's stance as “unbalanced... and hostile to Israel”, accusing it of bias and (hidden) antisemitism²⁰.

As Porat underlined, there is, in fact, a substantial divergence between institutional cooperation and the Israeli public's perception of the EU. The public often views the EU as adversarial, even though Israel's institutions recognise its importance in areas such as research, regional cooperation, and energy and infrastructure regulatory frameworks; roughly 54% of Israelis, including those with European passports, believe the EU to be an “enemy”, according to Porat²¹. The notion that Europe does not understand or agree with Israel's stance on the war is one factor that contributes to this opinion. Many Israelis are worried that antisemitism is spreading in some European governments and nations, and Porat says there is great fear about European countries, especially Belgium and the Netherlands.

According to Schueftan and Miller, there was a significant shift in how Europeans saw Israel following Israel's defensive measures in 2002 and 2004, which effectively reduced terrorism but went against European ideals, which tend to focus on treating its underlying causes. As previously indicated, they claim that European views on Israeli settlements are often perceived as “naïve”, and Israelis think that Europeans don't know enough about the Middle East, particularly when it comes to security. Many Israelis also believe that Europe is aiding Israel in a “political war”, especially at the UN and through the funding of non-governmental organisations. This belief is perceived as undermining Israel's

²⁰ Gomel, Giorgio. (2016). *Europe and Israel: A Complex Relationship*. Rome: Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI).

²¹ Asaf Porat, interview by author, October 23, 2024.

legitimacy. Because of this, many Israelis think that “if we (they) listened to Europe, we (they) wouldn't exist”²².

But because regional stability is complicated, Porat explains, Israeli authorities are cognisant of the unique challenges that Gaza and the West Bank face. Even while Gaza is primarily seen as a Hamas issue, the presence of violent Jewish extremists in the West Bank creates extra diplomatic obstacles that complicate contacts with EU officials and the Commission.

Given that the EU has never recognised Israeli control over occupied Palestinian land and has limited the accords to pre-1967 boundaries, Gomel also discusses the EU's “sticks” policy in relation to Israel. Despite Israel's complete participation in the Horizon research program, as will be explained below, EU finance for projects in West Bank settlements is banned, even for organisations with their headquarters in pre-1967 Israel. EU legislation also requires that products from these settlements be labelled in an effort to inform customers. Consequently, some Israeli companies have relocated inside the globally acknowledged Green Line, or “announced their intention to do so”²³. This dispute is essentially the result of divergent historical interpretations of sovereignty, national identity, and rights, which remain a recurring issue in their relationship and have a significant impact on both organisations' operations.

Idan Levy's thesis explores the widening divide between Israel's and the EU's historical narratives, especially under Prime Minister Netanyahu's leadership, which has supported Eurosceptic administrations to resist pressure from EU policies. Levy's research of how both nations employ historical narratives to explain their foreign policy using historical culture theory reveals the ideological divide between Israel's focus on security and sovereignty and the EU's identity as a normative power promoting peace and reconciliation. Overall, he concludes that despite political disagreements, Israel and the EU have close diplomatic and economic ties, with each side adamantly upholding its own normative stance²⁴.

²² Schueftan and Miller, “European-Israeli Relations.”

²³ Gomel, *Europe and Israel*, 2016.

²⁴ Levy, Idan. “Israel and the European Union's Normative Identity: Challenges of Diverging Historical Narratives”. Master's diss., (Lund University, 2021). <http://lup.lub.lu.se/student-papers/record/9046111>

Furthermore, Levy's analysis complements Anders Persson's study on the role of the EU's normative authority in shaping the discourse surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Even though the EU has not been able to resume peace negotiations, Persson states it has been effective in influencing world expectations for a "just peace" and advancing normative frameworks on issues like the illegality of Israeli settlements and the two-state solution²⁵.

Furthermore, Porat stressed that, although European cooperation is valuable, it mostly "serves as a long-term strategy, which limits its immediate impact in the view of many Israelis"²⁶. Israel does, however, recognise the EU's vital role as a strategic partner, especially for regional cooperation and R&D developments. Additionally, Israel expects to benefit greatly from EU regulatory standards expertise, particularly in the fields of infrastructure and energy. The idea that Israel-EU relations, despite their complexity, are vital and advantageous for both parties is strengthened by the necessity of such cooperation in promoting sustainable development and moving Israel in compliance with more general European norms.

In actuality, there are solid institutional and economic ties between Europe and Israel. Europe is by far Israel's largest commercial partner, accounting for 36% of its imports and 25% of its exports. The two continue to trade tariff-free on manufactured goods, but agricultural products are still subject to relatively minimal duties²⁷. A trading and economic relationship that began, *de facto*, in the early years of the State of Israel's and the European Economic Community's (EEC) creation.

Other areas of collaboration include environmental protection, transportation, and research and development (R&D). These days, Israel benefits greatly from EU financing programs like Horizon Europe and the European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument²⁸. As the "carrots," or food for the European hunger of chances, the EU's "carrots and sticks" policy includes incentives like trade access and research funds. Additionally, Israel takes part in EU "twinning" programs in transport and telecommunications, which enhances infrastructure alignment. Since it helps combat Islamist extremism and regional instability

²⁵ Persson, Anders. "Shaping Discourse and Setting Examples: Normative Power Europe Can Work in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict." *Journal of Common Market Studies* 55, no. 6 (2017): 1415-1431.

²⁶ Porat, interview by author.

²⁷ Gomel, *Europe and Israel*.

²⁸ Read Chapter ?.

that impacts European cities, partnership stability is strategically significant to the EU. The EU's commitment to democracy, human rights, and self-determination further highlights its approach to this collaboration²⁹.

²⁹ Gomel, *Europe and Israel*.

2. CHAPTER 1. Building the basis for EEC/EU-Israel relations (1950s-1970s)

In the institutional context of the early 1950s, Israel would have encountered a European landscape that was undergoing significant integration efforts. Developments during this period include the Schuman Declaration (9 May 1950), that proposed the integration of French and West German production of coal and steel under a single authority: the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), officially established by the Treaty of Paris, signed by the Six³⁰ the year after. In 1952, a new executive body responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Treaty emerged, the ECSC High Authority.

Moreover, 5 years later, the signature of the Treaties of Rome left with two new entities: the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom), with which the newborn State of Israel would interface. These would last until 1967, when they were merged into a single Commission, commonly known since the Treaty of Maastricht as "European Commission".

Despite the early establishment of these institutions in the post-war period, it wasn't until 1957 that Israel started approaching the recently created economic cooperative structure. A year in which it seriously "considered joining the European Economic Community"³¹, since the idea of building a common market would have greatly benefited Israel's trade and its developing economy, dependent on Europe.

Being the only semi-industrial country outside the EEC orbit, it applied for and actively sought for some form of association with the Community. Not only seen as an ally, but also a force seemingly counteractive to its objectives in the realms of export promotion and economic growth, it prompted Israel to strategically explore an agreement. This was pushed by the substantial deficit in the Balance of Payments (BoP), and the fact that they saw any future economic growth predominantly export-led, a context to which EEC policies could be seen as a potential threat³².

Two key export areas, namely citrus fruits and industrial products, emerged as strategic focal points. On the one hand, constituting a fifth of all agricultural production, citrus became an export product par excellence, representing over four-fifths of agricultural

³⁰ France, Italy, West Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands.

³¹ Pardo, Sharon, "The Year that Israel Considered Joining the European Economic Community", 2013.

³² Kreinin, Mordechai E. "Israel and the European Economic Community". *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 82, no. 2 (1968): 297-312. President and Fellows of Harvard College.

exports, and were ambitiously planned to grow at a rate of 14%³³. On the other hand, industrial production depended on imported materials and machinery, since it suffered from a shortage of raw materials, among other difficulties. Israeli focus on diversification and expansion in key sectors³⁴, that passed through settlement policies and the creation in new towns of competent industries, would have led the country to experience substantial growth in exports - but some political concerns later to be explored-, too. Moreover, concentration on light industries with relatively low "value added" implied the need for Israel to export a diverse range of manufactured goods in relatively small quantities.

With an export-oriented policy as the one to be assumed, unfavourable trade policies would have had significant economic consequences and led Israel to not achieve the annual targets for the following years³⁵. Indeed, in this context, being Europe the nearest market and EEC one of the few regions in which the country's products could be sold, a "natural outlet" for both citrus products and high quality industrial merchandise, Israel saw several potential benefits across trade, production, and investments. At the same time, an agreement with the EEC would have led Israel to benefit from the freeing of imports, essential for dependent industries.

Moreover, it would have also anticipated domestic transformation, re-allocating resources towards activities or production lines where the comparative costs are lower or more favourable, restricting monopoly power, and rationalising production and sales efforts; the author explains. It would have included the configuration of specialised plants of industrial products, esp. Textiles or new items specialty for citrus, too; a higher utilisation of capacity and setting up roof export companies. Furthermore, possessing highly trained and skilled workers, as well as know-how intensive industries and specialised plants, Israel positioned itself to attract foreign investments³⁶. A potential scenario, in this sense, would be that of European industries incentivized to subcontract high-skilled processes to such industries.

On the contrary, not trying to associate with the EEC could have had negative consequences for Israel. Nevertheless, potential drawbacks of the EEC are suggested to be

³³ Kreinin, "Israel and the European Economic Community", 1968.

³⁴ These include competitive industries like metal products, leather goods, electrical and electronic equipment, pipes, chemicals, and wood products (Kreinin, 1968).

³⁵ Within a time frame of five years, the established goals encompass a significant rise in the yearly exports of goods and services, aiming to surpass \$1.5 billion by 1970, more than doubling the existing figures. This envisioned increase in exports also aligns with the targeted annual growth of 3% in private consumption. These concerted efforts, as outlined by Kreinin (1968), were conceived to reduce the current account deficit.

³⁶ Ibid.

confined to citrus and unspecified dynamic manufacturing factors, with their actual magnitude remaining indeterminate³⁷. Expected negative effects include Israel's loss from a non-discriminatory Common External Tariff (CET) by the Six, estimated at around 10% in citrus and a foreign exchange cost around \$5 million for all affected industries, e.g., manufacturing of citrus juices. A substantial decline in citrus prices (60%) would lead to a deterioration in Israel's agricultural terms of trade, too, due to constant crating and marketing expenses.

In essence, however, an all-encompassing accord with the EEC held the potential to rejuvenate Israel's economy. Apart from these economic assets, political advantages also arose³⁸, and the conviction of the country that it would promote its well-being and even “survival” in the region.

All of these reasons prompted Israel to embark on an exploration of different possibilities for engagement with the EEC³⁹. Options included full membership, an Association Agreement, that would entail preferential access to EEC markets, economic and technical cooperation, financial aid and even lasting institutional ties; or an initial limited trade agreement focusing on export products. The first assumption was preferred, as it offered comprehensive economic and political advantages - but was deemed unrealistic. Political obstacles would emerge related to both the fear of harming relations of the Six with Arab countries, and the fact that EEC members were likely to see Israel as a “nuisance” or a “political obstacle to be overcome”, and not consider the economic opportunities within.

Despite potential difficulties, Israel decided **in 1957** to test the ground within a series of clandestine diplomatic actions with the EEC⁴⁰ and internal governmental meetings, i.e., within the framework of the Sapir Inter-ministerial Committee⁴¹ and the promotion of a Government Memo by Shimon Peres, Director General of Ministry of Defence Israel, that seemed to be backed by Prime Minister Ben-Gurion himself.

Indeed, Peres, who had been promoted in 1953 to that position, equivalent to a Secretary of State and responsible for all the technical aspects of such a relevant Israeli government

³⁷ Kreinin, 1968.

³⁸ Heimann, Gadi. (2015). “The Need to be Part of Europe: Israel's Struggle for an Association Agreement with the EEC, 1957–1961”. *Israel Studies*, 20(1), 86-109.

³⁹ Heimann, 2015.

⁴⁰ The information, unleashed by Pardo (2013), was sourced from archival documents, revealing a discreet and strategic approach to diplomatic endeavours.

⁴¹ These were appointed by Pinhas Sapir, Israel's Minister for Trade and Industry at the time.

office, was a relevant member of the Knesset for 14 consecutive parliamentary terms, and assumed other positions like Foreign Minister, and finally President of State. He played a key role in the development of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), providing them with modern Western-made weapon systems, and laid the foundations of the national aeronautical industry⁴². In relation to Europe, he helped strengthen diplomatic ties with France, in an attempt to find a common enemy with the Europe they dreamed of integrating and to assure their survival in case of an attack in the area from common “enemies”⁴³. Moreover, despite his later militaristic views, he always saw Europe as a model of unity and an ally to peace in the region⁴⁴.

Within an exhaustive analysis of the European integration project, his memorandum⁴⁵ presented a compelling argument for Israel to actively pursue inclusion in both the European common market and the political unification of Europe. Delivered to Israel's high-ranking officials, the supporting arguments were diverse. Recognising shared values - like “sense of proportion”, “sound judgement”, “democracy” - and geographical proximity, the memo emphasised the importance of preserving cultural ties. It also highlighted, even if vaguely, economic advantages, and identified Europe as an (emerging) economic and strategic power, noting also its military power and how it could contribute to Israel's (e.g., via weapons trade).

In addition, amidst the Cold War's complexities, associating with Europe would end Israel's isolation and help pursue its wider geostrategic and regional interests, esp. In Asia and Africa. The Israeli State positioned itself as a strategic bridge towards nations like Sudan, Ethiopia, Morocco, Tunisia and Lebanon, which seemed to exhibit a pro-European

⁴² According to (...), in the most present history, Shimon Peres also played a prestigious role in orchestrating the Oslo Accords with the Palestinians, enhancing relations between Yaser Arafat and Isaac Rabin, despite later gravitating towards Ariel Sharon's militaristic views. As President of Israel until 2014, he advocated for military campaigns against Hamas, engaged in diplomatic efforts with the Palestinian Mahmoud Abbas, and emphasised preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, while also critiquing Binyamin Netanyahu's expansion of Jerusalem at the expense of occupied territories. / “Shimon Peres” CIDOB, accessed [February 10, 2024], https://www.cidob.org/biografias_lideres_politicos/asia/israel/shimon_peres#1.

⁴³ This is described in Knesset, accessed [February 10, 2024], <https://main.knesset.gov.il/en/MK/APPS/mk/mk-public-activity-publications/104>, that clearly states Peres' interest in approaching France after Egyptian-Czechoslovak arms, since he knew about their discontent towards the Egyptian President for the rebellion against the French government in Algeria.

⁴⁴ “Europe has been and continues to be a major partner for peace and against terror”; “European Union and Israel to cooperate for the benefit of stability and prosperity in the Middle East”. Full Text of Peres's Address to the EU Parliament, *Times of Israel*, accessed [February 10, 2024], <https://www.timesofisrael.com/full-text-of-peress-address-to-the-eu-parliament/>.

⁴⁵ The official authorship of the document has never been declared, but was identified by Pardo (2013) through archival documentary analysis.

stance and shared apprehensions about the expansion of ideologies like Nasserism, pan-Islamism, and communism⁴⁶.

Steps towards European Integration were marked by the Sapir Inter-ministerial Committee, too, as detailed above⁴⁷. Appointed in April that year by Israel's Minister for Trade and Industry Pinhas Sapir, its aim was to assess the different options for Israeli integration in the EEC framework. Sapir, who had been designated in 1955, sought economic stability and had already opposed Israeli expansionist plans beyond the so-called Green Line post 1968⁴⁸, wanting to focus on internal development. For this, he saw in Europe an opportunity.

In this context, a working subcommittee presented a preliminary report suggesting full economic and political EEC membership, even if it would entail Israel to introduce substantial economic reforms in fields like foreign trade, current exchange rates, wages and prices⁴⁹.

This would have probably meant for Israel several instances: a change in external commercial policies to comply with EEC standards and regulations; an adjustment of the wage structure to ensure equal treatment and pay between Israeli workers and those from EEC countries; an adjustment and control of prices, whose effects would go from damage to companies and consumers, to risk of inflation and limiting economic growth; and an alignment of Israeli currency exchange rates with those of the EEC, reducing international competitiveness of Israeli exports outside the EEC area and thus the volume of exports, of which the country depended. These would have probably not only faced internal resistance, but needed a huge amount of resources and time to be implemented.

Hence, 5 months later, when the committee convened on September the 30th to discuss these recommendations, they reached opposite conclusions. It was alleged that such changes in economic policy would be too traumatic for Israel at the time, esp., for exports, divesting export subsidies, establishing import tariffs, and carrying out domestic market controls. Moreover, they would anyway face some political resistance, esp., from countries

⁴⁶ See also Pardo, "The Year that Israel Considered Joining the European Economic Community", 2013.

⁴⁷ Works in this framework have been analysed both by Pardo (2013) and Heimann (2015).

⁴⁸ <https://israeled.org/pinhas-sapir/> ; Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2024, January 1). Pinhas Sapir. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Pinhas-Sapir>

⁴⁹ Pardo, 2013.

like France. In this sense, they didn't think joining EEC was possible nor in the interest of Israel at the moment, with such a developing economy.

However, other association forms were suggested to be explored within the Organization for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC), that would protect a vulnerable economy like the Israeli's, establishing an independent free area⁵⁰.

Clandestine meetings between Peres and Jean Monnet also took place at the end of the 50s. On the 18th of May, a preliminary discussion was held. Peres reached out to Monnet, one of the founding members of the Union and who served as the first president of the ECSC's High Authority until 1955. As a promoter of a Neofunctionalism integration model, he defended sectoral integration of specific policy areas, in this case the common market regulation, that would lead in the last stance to political integration, too⁵¹.

For this, Monnet was clear and firm from the beginning: Israel would have to seek less ambitious association forms. Even if Monnet was contrary to political unification, he agreed with economic unification⁵². The European Community (EC)'s free trade area, and in the near future even a free market with no customs, to be ratified, were promoted. A currency agreement was suggested to Israel, too, as well as expanding relations with Germany.

Although conclusions of these meetings had potential benefits, it created some internal discomfort and blocked governmental official contacts with the EEC. Since Israeli Foreign Affairs Minister Golda Meier wasn't informed about these secret talks, as soon as she found out, she proceeded to cancel her meeting with Monnet on her visit to Paris in early July 1957 to explore Israeli accession to European programmes. In this occasion, Meier made a certainly hasty decision prompted by her emotional and overwhelmed feeling in her role by Ben-Gurion's right hand, which would slow down association talks.

Meier already had a similar reaction deferring from Ben-Gurion's preference of approaching Europe through the Federal Republic of Germany for personal reasons, despite acknowledging that it was the only way to "cement ties with the rising European power". Indeed, France would have probably withdrawn its commitments with Israel once

⁵⁰ As Heimann (2015) notes, this was assessed on the basis of experience with other countries such as Turkey, Portugal or Poland.

⁵¹ Jean Monnet's vision and conception of the European Union are reflected in Ramiro Troitiño (2017) and Duroselle, J.B. (1966).

⁵² Pardo, 2013.

the rebellion in Argelia was over, so the only way of approaching Europe was the one she actually rejected, preferring more the British, Benelux or Italian path⁵³.

Despite so, Peres, who most aligned with Ben-Gurion, is supposed to have met Monnet again in September the 7th, concurrently with the Sapir Inter-ministerial Committee convention, in order to deepen into the possibility for Israel to become a member in the common market; even if the fact of this encounter actually happening remains uncertain⁵⁴. Nevertheless, in December, Peres did visit Bonn under recommendation of Monnet, trying to establish ties with Germany.

Further contacts between the two entities happened that year, through the Israeli missions in the German country, i.e., in Cologne⁵⁵. Within a communication of the 21st of June, Moshe Tavor, Director of the Department of Information announced that a cooperation was to be created between the Israeli pool of translators and interpreters and the European Institutions, that were facing a shortage in translation services from German to English and French. The proposal, indeed, came from André Kaminker, chief interpreter of the Council of Europe. Unfortunately, it never came to fruition⁵⁶.

Parallel to all these moves towards a desired integration were being made, in March, the Rome Treaty was enacted, officially establishing the European Economic Community (EEC), commonly referred to as the Common Market. A significant aspect of this treaty were provisions in Art. 237 and 238, that stated acceptance of new members requiring unanimous consent from the existing member states, which would complicate Israel's outlook; but allowed states with special commercial relations with the market, or those either unwilling or ineligible to apply for full membership, to enter into association agreements with the EEC. Indeed, these provided a legal framework that Israel could leverage to navigate its integration efforts with the EEC.

Israel was definitely willing to collaborate with the Six, but were they, too? As last insights show, in the first phase, the project of Israeli integration was not entirely one-sided – Brussels also reached out to and started conversations. However, there were some

⁵³ More on her role as Foreign Minister in Medzini, M. (2017) *Golda Meir: a political biography*. Boston ; Berlin: De Gruyter. [Pdf] Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2019667809/>

⁵⁴ Pardo, 2013.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ A formal reply and proposal shall have arrived by the month of July, according to Pardo (2013) analysed records, but still in August 1957, Kaminker admitted to still be waiting for an answer from the institutions.

economic and political barriers, especially for a future full membership, which caused Israel to definitely abandon its dream in 1958, and to start actively seeking sole associated member status.

Within a “Note for Director General Seeliger”⁵⁷ Mr. Jean Rey, Chairman of the External Relations Group of the recently-created Commission, stated the visit in April of M. Rafael, Israel's Minister in Brussels, and his intention "to organise ongoing relations with the Community". This inaugurated a whole series of visits and diplomatic meetings that would bring Israel closer to the European framework, albeit rather uneasily at times. Indeed, the diplomat emphasised Israel's issues with the common market and how this would be a constraint for its definitive establishment in Brussels, as well as for the call of experts in the field who could be part of the mission. Once these barriers had been overcome, Israel would become one of the first countries keen to establish a diplomatic mission in Brussels⁵⁸, renewing its commitment to exploring relations with the EEC.

The first proposal of an agreement of some sort arrived in June that year from the Foreign Affairs Ministry of Israel, which sought a multilateral agreement with the OEEC countries, of an economic nature, which would lower the contingency regime for imports in Israel, increase the degree of liberalisation - and the appliance of a non-discriminatory regime to the non-liberalised products and the transfer of credit balances in favour of Israel from one country to the other⁵⁹. This started to be studied by a Commission's expert group some months later, in November⁶⁰; but the proposal being rejected by the Council at the end of the year, declaring the impossibility of introducing a multilateral payment system with Israel due to its political and commercial implications, and the fact that this would entail a revision of the relation with other third countries⁶¹.

The way of unblocking the situation could be various ways, from the signature of a multilateral agreement with the OEEC as an organisation, negotiations with the EEC through GATT - Israel had joined in March 1959-; bilateral agreements with the EEC

⁵⁷ Rey, J. “Note pour monsieur le directeur général Seeliger” April 14. BAC-003/1978_0321. Historical Archives of the European Union, Florence.

⁵⁸ Pardo (2013) points out that the request took place in April 1958, making Israel the third country to seek a diplomatic mission in Brussels after Greece - a country engaged in negotiations with the European Community - and the United States.

⁵⁹ Hizjer. “Note pour M. Behr.” November. BAC-003/1978_0322. Historical Archives of the European Union, Florence.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ N.d. “Conseil – Note du Secretariat”. December 9. BAC-003/1978_0321. Historical Archives of the European Union, Florence.

members individually or even joining the European Free Trade Area, agreement signed with outer countries on the 20th July⁶².

2.1. Diplomacy for association

The Israeli leadership in the late 1950s considered Europe as essential for the continued existence and economic advancement of the nascent Jewish state. Pardo indicates that Israel contemplated “the possibility of acquiring full economic and political EEC membership”⁶³. The EEC posed both problems and possible advantages, and, as Kreinin elucidates, Israel regarded the EEC as a “formidable force counteracting its goals in export promotion and economic development”⁶⁴.

The Israeli government contended that affiliation with the EEC may enhance commerce, output, foreign investments, and industrial expansion. Israel, being a proficient workforce with experience in knowledge-intensive sectors, had then the capacity to draw European investments and subcontracting opportunities in high-skill domains.

Israel expected that integration with the EEC would enhance economic efficiency, facilitate resource reallocation, and diminish monopolistic power, too. The nation anticipated improved manufacturing methods and enhanced export capabilities in sectors like textiles and citrus. The potential change of Israel's economy under EEC influence was seen essential, prompting Heimann to assert that Israel's authorities saw connection with the EEC as crucial for “the fledgling country's well being and even survival”⁶⁵.

Notwithstanding its aspirations, Israel's trajectory towards affiliation with the EEC encountered several obstacles. Politically, an affiliation with Israel jeopardised the EEC's ties with Arab states, particularly for countries such as France and Italy, who had substantial interests in the Middle East. Numerous causes prompted Israeli officials to want affiliation, including moral obligations to Germany, historical and cultural connections with Europe, and strong relations with France⁶⁶.

⁶² Heimann, 2015.

⁶³ Pardo, 2013.

⁶⁴ Kreinin, 1968.

⁶⁵ Heimann, 2015.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Heimann contends that “The Six never perceived Israel as an economic asset but merely as a nuisance; a political impediment to be surmounted rather than an opportunity to be capitalised upon”. Moreover, the increasing proportion of Israeli exports to the EEC, approaching 30% of Israel's overall exports, emphasised the prospective economic advantages that EEC participation may offer⁶⁷.

Diplomatic ties between Israel and the EEC commenced in 1959, spearheaded by Moshe Bartur, the director of the Economic Department of Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Bartur significantly contributed to establishing Israel's early diplomatic relations with Europe, resulting in an official mission to the EEC in January 1959⁶⁸.

During a pivotal discussion in February, Israeli diplomats delineated three aims for their engagement with Europe: seeking full EEC membership, obtaining association under Article 238 of the Treaty of Rome, and fostering dialogue on pragmatic issues to establish a presence in Europe. Subsequently, the same year, advantageous changes in the EEC's position prompted first conversations for an association agreement, with Bartur participating in informal negotiations with European Commission officials⁶⁹.

During the early 1960s, Israeli officials, notably Prime Minister Ben-Gurion, endorsed initiatives to establish a partnership with the EEC to safeguard Israel's economic and political interests. Ben-Gurion deemed collaboration with Europe “essential for Israel” and promoted a targeted initiative to strengthen connections with European institutions⁷⁰.

Nevertheless, despite persistent diplomatic endeavours, including engagement with France and the EEC's Big Three, European apprehensions eventually dominated. The Council of Ministers dismissed Israel's request in 1962, citing apprehensions over Arab relations, Israel's non-European status, and urgent EEC objectives. The EEC thus terminated future discussions, concluding Israel's maiden endeavour for affiliation⁷¹.

⁶⁷ Heimann, 2015.

⁶⁸ BAC-003/1978_0322.

⁶⁹ Heimann, 2015.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

2.2. Exploration of energy cooperation

Parallel to all this, in 1959 cooperation between European institutions and Israel also in the field of atomic energy was weighed up. From the part of the Commission, as indicated in the “Aide-memoire Relations Extérieures” of March that year, the attitude was nothing but favourable when it came to pacific use of atomic energy⁷².

Israel also made steps forward by accrediting a mission in favour of collaboration with Euratom, which carried out an experts’ visit in September with the intention of promoting the employment of Israeli engineers and researchers in their offices or national laboratories linked with Euratom, who were in lack of material resources, and needed specialised scientists to develop their atomic programme, based on a research related to the extraction of uranium, combined with phosphate⁷³.

The proposal received the confirmation of Euratom’s Commission in January 1960, including the possibility of activating traineeships, approving on a case-by-case basis Israeli research contracts in support of Euratom, and starting a whole series of professional exchanges through conference invitations of Israeli engineers and government official, research proposals and staff exchanges and study visits for boosting cooperation especially in the field of research on materials⁷⁴.

2.3. Introduction of R&D schemes of cooperation in the early 70s

In the early 1970s, a new window of cooperation opened between Israel and the EEC: science and Research and Development (R&D). The topic was brought onto the table after a visit to Brussels in May 1971 of both Dr. Tal, President of the Israeli National Council for R&D, and Dr. Saphir; but it wasn’t until November that the first European bureaucrat visited to test the waters. In Appleyard’s “Note to Mr. Blin”⁷⁵, relations in this field in the form of information exchanges and study trips, as well as the possible creation of a Joint

⁷² N.d. “Aide-memoire Relations Extérieures”. March 20. BAC086/1982_0131. Historical Archives of the European Union, Florence.

⁷³ Foch, R., and J. Gueron. “Note au Commission”. October 5. BAC086/1982_0131. Historical Archives of the European Union, Florence.

⁷⁴ Hirsch. “Lettre de Hirsch à l’Ambassadeur Rafael, concernant les projets de cooperation pratique entre la Commission de l’Euratom et la Commission israélienne”. January 12. BAC086/1982_0131. Historical Archives of the European Union, Florence.

⁷⁵ Appleyard, R.K. “Note to Mr. Blin”. *Relations avec Israël*. December 21, [1958–1971]. BAC086/1982_0131. Historical Archives of the European Union, Florence. Accessed [January 22, 2024]. https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/555856?item=CEUE_REEX-120.

Consultative Committee, were recommended to be developed. Israel was pictured as a country with small-scale and limited R&D, confined to the practice of desalination with brackish water, and at the time it lacked a Ministry of Science; but research outcomes were qualified as of “high quality”.

The quality of the research was also emphasised by Schuster, Deputy Director-General of the Industrial, Technological and Scientific Affairs DG of the EC Commission, who conducted a second visit in May 1972 together with other personalities from his institution, and declared a great potential for research and industrial development in the aeronautical, chemical and science-based industries, such as the Weizmann Institute. Some of the potential areas of research cooperation highlighted desalination, environmental protection, especially water pollution but also atmospheric pollution (e.g., effects on vegetation); nuclear research and nuclear physics, electronics, materials, e.g., for desalination plants, gas turbines (cf. aeronautical industry) and protection against corrosion (industrial application); agriculture, e.g., exploitation of arid zones, irrigation...; and technology forecasts.

Institutionalisation of research was rather weak, given the lack of a national authority - if not a national council from the early 1960s - and the lack of a national R&D plan or policy, only individual studies from different sectors.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, Schuster insisted on cooperation between authorities also in this respect. This could take various forms, ranging from grants and internships for Israeli scientists to visit laboratories in the EEC and Member States, participation in research projects, also through the European Science Foundation; science policy work, by charging studies to the EEC; activities of COST groups⁷⁷ and regular meetings, annually or biannually, to review collaborations.

Transitioning from a limited economic focus to broader cooperative endeavours solidified the perception of Israel as a “component of the Western world situated in the Middle East”, with the establishment of research and higher education institutions and industrial development serving as pivotal identifiers. Schuster also underlined several parallels he

⁷⁶ According to Schuster, the way in which this should be structured was through the placement of a Chief-scientist in every ministry concerned with research that was responsible for awarding contracts and grants to research institutes.

⁷⁷ According to the definition of COST Association (n.b.), COST actions are “an interdisciplinary research network that brings researchers and innovators together to investigate a topic of their choice (...) typically made up of researchers from academia, SMEs, public institutions and other relevant organisations or interested parties”. *Although it is not a definition created at the time or referring to the same funding programmes, it might be meaningful in the context.*

noted throughout his trips, particularly with the scientific domain, including the advancement of the agricultural sector and, probably most notably, the populace's attitudes and the ideals they support.

2.4. Main development: Free Trade area

While institutional developments were taking place within Europe in 1974 and 1975, with the creation and first works of the European Council in the framework of the Paris summit, a major step with the signature of the Agreement on a Free Trade Area between the EEC and Israel 11 May 1975, took place.

Indeed, this accord placed Israel as the first Mediterranean nation to engage in a significant commercial accord with the EEC and facilitated access for Israeli industrial and agricultural exports to Western European markets. Entering into force on 1 July, it established a systematic framework for tariff abolition, specifying that by July 1977, tariffs on Israeli industrial products would be eliminated, and by 1989, European products would be admitted into Israel duty-free.

Aside from its economic dimensions, the deal has considerable political ramifications, having been executed during a time when EEC member states were adopting pro-Arab policies, which Israel perceived as a departure from regional neutrality⁷⁸.

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Summarising, this period was characterised by the exploration of various avenues for collaboration between the European institutions and the Israeli government, which took the form of a series of agreements, especially in the field of economy and trade. Starting from a three-year non-preferential trade agreement signed in 1964, which developed into a free trade agreement (FTA) in 1975, and into a full Association Agreement in 1995, as we will see later. From here, Israeli-EEC relations would start an upgrade process that would change the conception of European integration forever.

⁷⁸ Government of Israel. *Agreement Between the EEC and Israel: 11 May 1975*. Accessed October 10, 2024. <https://www.gov.il/en/pages/82-agreement-between-the-eeec-and-israel-11-may-1975>.

3. CHAPTER 2. Disruption and reopening of EEC-Israel relationship (1970s - 1990s)

Between the 1970s and the 1990s, EEC-Israel relations saw fluctuations that underscored progress, regressions, and the final formation of more organised cooperation frameworks. Israel's strategic objective to enhance relations with the EEC started with accords centred on free trade and industrial collaboration, as both parties aimed to align their economic interests. Despite challenges associated with the political landscape in the Middle East and evolving priorities in Europe, Israel and the EEC attained notable advancements in commerce and research and development collaboration, establishing a foundation for prospective association initiatives.

In the 1970s, the establishment and formalisation of economic connections occurred. The execution of a Preferential Trade pact on 29 June 1970 was a pivotal milestone in EEC-Israel ties, building upon a preceding three-year non-preferential trade pact established in 1964. This accord sought to enhance trade conditions by the reduction of tariffs on industrial goods, expiring in October 1975. During this period, both sides expected the advantages of enhanced economic relations, concentrating on trade liberalisation in products and augmenting industrial collaboration.

The Free Trade Area Agreement of 1975, agreed on 11 May and implemented on 1 July, was a significant advancement. This agreement aimed to create a free trade zone for industrial items by gradually eliminating customs charges. The complete creation of this free trade zone in the industrial sector was realised on 1 January 1989, when Israel eliminated all outstanding customs tariffs on imports from the EEC⁷⁹.

Concurrent with trade agreements, the early 1970s signified Israel's investigation into prospective partnerships in research and development (R&D) with the EEC. Following the visit of Israeli officials Dr. Tal and Dr. Saphir to the European Commission in May 1971, talks commenced to design a framework for research and development collaboration. The 1971 Appleyard Report, referenced in CEUE_REEX-120 > BAC086/1982_0131⁸⁰, advocated for a progressive enhancement of R&D collaboration, highlighting Israel's

⁷⁹ Regulation No. 1274/75, EEC.

⁸⁰ Appleyard, R.K. "Note to Mr. Blin". *Relations avec Israël*. December 21, [1958–1971]. BAC086/1982_0131. Historical Archives of the European Union, Florence. Accessed [January 22, 2024]. https://archives.eui.eu/en/fonds/555856?item=CEUE_REEX-120.

superior research standards and expertise in areas such as desalination and electronics, notwithstanding the restricted size of its R&D industry at that period.

In June 1972, a study by Schuster, Glaesner, and Bourdeau underscored Israel's "high-quality research potential", focussing on areas of mutual interest such as water management, nuclear research, and agriculture⁸¹. These first attempts would provide the groundwork for more substantial research and development collaboration in subsequent decades.

The formation of the European Council in December 1974 functioned as an informal platform for EEC member states to deliberate on issues of regional and international significance, encompassing Mediterranean ties. This growth corresponded with the EEC's overarching Mediterranean strategy established in 1973, aimed at enhancing economic and political relations with Mediterranean nations. Within this context, the EEC saw Israel as an essential partner in the area, sharing interests in economic development, security, and scientific progress.

The European Parliament's creation of a Delegation for Relations with Israel (D-IL) in 1979 was a notable institutional advancement. The D-IL sought to institutionalise parliamentary conversation, embodying a systematic method to tackle shared issues and improve comprehension between the EEC and Israel. Tove Nielsen, a Danish politician affiliated with the Liberal Democrats, held the position of its inaugural President, promoting dialogues aimed at enhancing collaboration and tackling intricate political challenges.

By the conclusion of the 1980s, Israel and the EEC had formed a comprehensive free trade zone, signifying a significant milestone in their bilateral ties. The conclusion of this process on 1 January 1989, when Israel abolished its last customs charges on EEC imports, represented the effective achievement of a long-term objective established in the 1975 Free Trade Agreement. This industrial free trade zone highlighted the robustness of the EEC-Israel relationship and established a solid economic basis for forthcoming association agreements.

⁸¹ Foch, R., and J. Gueron. "Note au Commission". October 5. BAC086/1982_0131. Historical Archives of the European Union, Florence.

The 1992 signing of the Maastricht Treaty established the European Union (EU), substantially broadening the political and economic framework of the EEC and facilitating new opportunities for international collaboration. This transition posed problems and possibilities for Israel, as the newly established EU became more integrated and possibly more important in global affairs. The accord stimulated increased Israeli enthusiasm in seeking official connection with the EU, an aim previously obstructed by political problems. The EU's emphasis on political integration and alignment with overarching regional goals, such as Middle Eastern stability, introduced further complexities to the diplomatic dialogue between Israel and the EU.

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In summary, the period from the 1970s to the 1990s was pivotal for EEC-Israel relations, marked by a transition from fundamental trade agreements to the establishment of R&D collaboration and institutional interaction via organisations such as the D-IL. Notwithstanding political obstacles, such as tensions with Arab nations and changes within the EEC/EU, Israel's dedication to integration and the EEC's acknowledgement of Israel as a pivotal Mediterranean ally facilitated a strong alliance. These initiatives created a foundation that would subsequently facilitate Israel's ambitions for enhanced association and cooperation with the EU across several sectors.

4. CHAPTER 3. From Oslo to the Association Agreement, a peace attempt (1990s - early 2000s)

The EU-Israel Association Agreement (AA), signed on 20 November 1995 and effective from 2000, was a significant milestone in formally establishing relations between the EU and Israel. This agreement provided a legislative framework to enhance political discourse, economic collaboration, and trade facilitation among the parties. The economic measures were crucial in the Agreement, which also created a legal structure for the institutionalisation of political contact between the two, as indicated in Articles 3-5 of the Association Agreement. Sharon Pardo and Peters assert, in this context, that

“it has allowed for a continuous dialogue and the emergence of a vast degree of cooperative ventures between Israel and the EU on a range of issues”⁸².

Israel thereafter became an associated nation of the EU, with the primary mechanisms for political interaction established within this framework: the Association Council, governed by Articles 67-69 of the Association Agreement, and the Association Committee, delineated by Articles 70-73; which functioned as the principal channels for conversation and cooperation on matters specified in the agreement.

Sion-Tzidkiyahu defines the Association Council, the primary mechanism for achieving this goal, as “the institutionalisation of an annual dialogue at the level of foreign ministers between Israel and the EU”. Within the European framework, the High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy and the rotating Presidency of the Council serve as representatives.

This institutional framework is underpinned by an Association Committee composed of senior civil officials from both the EU, represented by the Commission and the Council of the EU, and Israel, via pertinent ministries, including the Foreign Ministry, as well as Home Affairs, Defence, and Economy. Furthermore, eight issue-specific sub-committees and two working groups were established in 2005, addressing themes such as legal matters, economic-financial affairs, health-immigration-welfare, research, among others, alongside human rights and antisemitism.

⁸² Pardo, Sharon., & Peters, Joel. (2010). *Uneasy Neighbours: Israel and the European Union*. Lexington Books.

All these bodies are expected to convene annually, comprising “professional officials”; yet, as we shall see, political conditions do not always permit them to meet this obligation.

Beyond the Association Agreement, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) of 1995, the latter signed on 28 November, have provided important frameworks for cooperation⁸³. Indeed, bilateral relations between them further improved from 2004 within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), which fostered enhanced political discussion and economic convergence, and advanced EU-Israel cooperation in legal, environmental, scientific, and technological fields, among others⁸⁴.

On the other hand, the EMP, launched in Barcelona shortly after the Association Agreement, aimed to promote peace, stability, and economic progress in the Mediterranean by fostering partnerships with 12 Mediterranean countries, including Israel. This regional cooperation was aligned with the peace processes set forth by the Oslo Accords, which aimed to foster regional stability and economic ties through development cooperation.

Nonetheless, criticism emerged about these organisations, as several observers contended they were unresponsive to regional political shifts and constrained by EU restrictions on further integration for non-member nations like Israel. Proposals for enhanced regional councils or other integration models have been suggested to mitigate these limits, with the objective of fostering a more dynamic and adaptive approach⁸⁵.

The two primary domains of collaboration that arose under these frameworks are research and development (R&D) and higher education. The EU-Israel collaboration in research and development was reinforced by the Association Agreement, granting Israel access to EU-funded research programs. This relationship has facilitated substantial progress in domains such as science, technology, and innovation, establishing Israel as a pivotal EU partner in these sectors. Likewise, higher education and academic exchange emerged as a fundamental element, with Israeli institutions participating in collaborative EU initiatives, facilitating student and staff mobility, and standardising educational criteria.

⁸³ Read CHAPTER 4-5 to learn more about the ENP and Israel engagement through different instruments and a proper Action Plan.

⁸⁴ Tovias, Alfred. (2003). *Mapping Israel's Policy Options regarding Its Future Institutionalised Relations with the European Union*. Middle East & Euro-Med Working Paper No. 3, March 2003. [Working Paper]

⁸⁵ See, for example: Pardo, Sharon. (2008). *Towards an Ever Closer Partnership: A Model for a New Euro-Israeli Partnership*. EUROMESCO.

1. CHAPTER 4. Closer to EU programmes, further from the institutions and diplomatic relations (2004 - 2013)

In 2004, the EU officially integrated Israel into its European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), initiating enhanced cooperation through initiatives such as Twinning and TAIEX, which enabled the exchange of public sector expertise and the establishment of bilateral meetings among officials⁸⁶. This framework represented an effort to engage Israel in EU-led integration initiatives while maintaining a separation from complete institutional affiliations. The approach sought to promote collaboration via targeted activities without necessitating official EU membership.

In 2005, the EU and Israel formulated an Action Plan, effective until January 2025, specifying shared objectives in areas like commerce, governance, and security; and facilitating the incorporation of Israel into European policies and programs⁸⁷.

The EU-Israel Action Plan, formulated under the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) following the EU's 2004 enlargement, seeks to enhance political, economic, and cultural integration between the EU and Israel, taking advantage of their geographical proximity and mutual commitment to democracy and human rights. It fosters a collaboration grounded on mutual interests and advocates for Israel's enhanced involvement in the EU's internal market and Community initiatives, particularly via mechanisms such as TAIEX. The strategy underscores bilateral collaboration in domains including counterterrorism, regional security, commerce, and environmental sustainability, while also aiming to enhance civil society and address anti-Semitism.

Some years later, in 2008, EU-Israel ties advanced considerably, however they were subsequently impacted by regional tensions. On 16 June, during the 8th EU-Israel Association Council in Luxembourg, leaders from the EU and Israel exhibited a shared dedication to fortify their partnership, consenting to incrementally improve relations under the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) framework⁸⁸. The establishment of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) facilitated collaboration among Mediterranean countries, too, including Israel as a founding member.

In December that year, the EU External Relations Council introduced guidelines in Brussels aimed at further integrating Israel into EU frameworks, recommending actions such as ad hoc summits

⁸⁶ European Commission. *ANNEX to the Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on A Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood*. Brussels, 2022. Available at: https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/c75bdbbb-32ae-4408-9bed-5f782b2c0ad5_en?filename=C_2022_9946_F1_ANNEX_EN_V2_P1_2462010.PDF.

⁸⁷ See European Union External Action, *EU/Israel Action Plan* (European Commission, 2005), accessed October 25, 2024, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2019-11/eu-israel_action_plan_2005.pdf.

⁸⁸ Sharon Pardo, *Israel and the European Union: An Uneasy Relationship* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

between state leaders, regular foreign ministers' meetings, and structured consultations with Israeli officials⁸⁹.

However, the outbreak of the Gaza Conflict (Operation Cast Lead) from 27 December 2008 to 18 January 2009 led to a freeze in diplomatic relations between Israel and the EU, with certain agreements suspended until 2010. This tension underscored the volatility of EU-Israeli relations amid regional conflicts.

5.1. 2009-2010 Political paralysis BUT trade/economic cooperation

Between 2009 and 2010, EU-Israel ties encountered substantial political obstacles, chiefly attributable to the tensions arising from Israel's Operation Cast Lead in Gaza (December 2008 - January 2009) and the persistent growth of Israeli settlements. These acts prompted claims of abuses of international law and human rights, undermining diplomatic relations and creating tensions within established EU-Israel structures, like the EU-Israel Association Council.

Notwithstanding the above, the 9th EU-Israel Association Council convened in Luxembourg in June 2009, during which the EU reaffirmed its appeal for a lasting resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian issue. Nevertheless, escalating objections after Operation Cast Lead, encompassing allegations of excessive force and civilian losses, limited diplomatic discourse.

In September 2009, during a meeting of the Delegation for relations with Israel (D-IL) in Strasbourg, chaired by Jana Hybaskova (PPE-DE, Czech Republic), key issues included purported human rights violations and the escalating Israeli settlement activity. The concerns resulted in reduced D-IL activity, illustrating the disparity between EU aspirations and Israeli actions.

Despite political stagnation, again, economic collaboration between the EU and Israel persisted. In 2010, negotiations concerning agricultural goods and fisheries culminated in successful agreements, and the Agreement on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance of Industrial goods (ACAA) was reached, notably addressing pharmaceutical items⁹⁰. This

⁸⁹ B'Tselem, *Guidelines for Israel's Investigation into Operation Cast Lead: 27 December 2008 – 18 January 2009* (February 2009), 1.

⁹⁰ European Union, "Euro-Mediterranean Agreement Establishing an Association between the European Communities and Their Member States, of the One Part, and the State of Israel, of the Other Part", *Official Journal of the European Union*, February 6, 2004, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A22004A0206%2801%29>.

agreement enabled the reciprocal acknowledgement of product standards, improving commerce by streamlining export processes for Israeli pharmaceutical items to the EU, therefore demonstrating both sides' dedication to sustaining economic and trade connections despite diplomatic tensions.

5.2. 2011-2012 – Normalisation of relations within the Association Council

Between 2011 and 2012, initiatives to normalise EU-Israel ties advanced within the context of the EU-Israel Association Council, subsequent to the political tensions of previous years.

The 10th EU-Israel Association Council, convened on 22 February 2011, signified an important turning point as both parties articulated a definitive intention to reinvigorate relations and recommence efforts on the Association Agreement Action Plan (AP), as detailed in previous chapters, an initiative initiated under the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) framework⁹¹. This represented a progression towards restoring political discourse and improving cooperation throughout the framework of the Association Council, and beyond, which had been somewhat constrained by the Gaza conflict and concerns over Israeli settlement activities.

Further, the 11th EU-Israel Association Council, convened on 24 July the year after, reinforced this reconciliation by enhancing bilateral collaboration in essential domains, such as research, culture, social development, and finance⁹². Both parties also discussed increased security concerns and similar perspectives on the larger Middle East Peace Process, indicating a mutual goal in fostering stability in the region.

Moreover, this was the period in which science cooperation and collaboration in research and development was pushed by both parties. In fact, the first EU documents on science diplomacy came out in 2012: “Strategic approach enhancing Research and Innovation”⁹³.

⁹¹ Embassy of Israel to the European Union and NATO, *EU-Israel Association Agreement*, n.d.

⁹² Council of the European Union, *Press Release: 11th Meeting of the EU-Israel Association Council*, July 24, 2012.

⁹³ A new document will be released in December 2024-January 2025: “EU Science Diplomacy Strategy - Report”. It will contain recommendations from the present to the future; and be preceded by a broad context and history. / To read more about this topic, see in ANNEX: Mourato Pinto, João, interview by author, October 11, 2024.

This phase of collaboration exhibited a revitalised dedication from both the EU and Israel to overcome previous disagreement and pursue mutually advantageous objectives, though remaining difficulties.

5.3. 2013-2021 – A frozen system and harsh criticism linked to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

From 2013 until 2021, EU-Israel relations were strained owing to the EU's critical position towards Israel's actions in the disputed Palestinian territories. Nevertheless, specific pivotal agreements maintained economic cooperation, demonstrating a delicate coexistence, and link, between critique and collaboration.

In June 2013, the Agreement on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance of Industrial Products (ACAA) was implemented, facilitating trade for industrial goods such as medicines by harmonising Israeli product standards with those of the EU.

However, one month after, the EU promulgated guidelines rendering Israeli firms operating in regions occupied since 1967 ineligible for EU financing, so establishing a distinct demarcation between Israel's internationally recognised boundaries and the occupied territories⁹⁴. Thus "Israeli institutions and bodies situated across the pre-1967 Green Line" (West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights) would no longer be eligible for funding from 2014 on⁹⁵. This strategy emphasised the EU's dedication to international law and a two-state solution, while opposing the growth of settlements; but hindered relations with Israel, who perceived it somehow as a threat.

Regardless such challenges in politics, economic collaboration persisted, particularly via the EU-Israel Euro-Mediterranean Aviation Agreement⁹⁶, which liberalised the aviation markets between Israel and the EU, therefore improving connectivity and competitiveness.

⁹⁴ European Commission, *Guidelines on the Eligibility of Israeli Entities and Their Activities in the Territories Occupied by Israel Since June 1967 for Grants, Prizes, and Financial Instruments Funded by the EU from 2014 Onwards*, July 19, 2013. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2019-11/guidelines_on_the_eligibility_of_israeli_entities_and_their_activities_in_the_territories_occupied_by_israel_since_june_1967.pdf.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ European Union, *Euro-Mediterranean Aviation Agreement between the EU and Israel: Summary*, 2013. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/euro-mediterranean-aviation-agreement-between-the-eu-and-israel.html>.

This time illustrates the EU's strategy of promoting economic collaboration with Israel while keeping a resolute position on political matters. Despite the difficult geopolitical environment and intermittent diplomatic tensions, the partnership in research, development, and innovation was strengthened. New alliances and structures, such the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) instruments were developed, alongside the continuing conventions of the formal Association Councils, highlighting shared interests in economy and the environment.

Nevertheless, the collaboration was hindered by persistent disputes, notably the Gaza conflict, which obstructed advancement and highlighted the EU's position on Israel's occupied territories. With the EU's enlargement, it strengthened its approach of "integration without membership" for Israel, balancing cooperation with rigorous regulatory demands over settlements. The EU emphasised human rights issues, asserting that although economic and sectoral collaborations were appreciated, adherence to EU principles and standards was crucial for enduring partnerships.

2. CHAPTER 5. Current relations (2013 - nowadays): turbulent era and attempts at revival

Despite the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) Country Report on Israel, which was released in 2013, picturing Israel as a successful partner and stating the interest of the European Union in supporting Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, advocating for a two-state solution⁹⁷, the European Union decided to suspend the Association Council one year later, due to the ongoing regional tensions.

By implementing the *Interpretative Notice on Indication of Origin of Goods from the Territories Occupied by Israel since June 1967* in 2015, the EU maintained its policy of differentiation with respect to Israeli settlements in occupied territories⁹⁸. The notice specified that products manufactured in these territories should be designated as originating from Israeli settlements rather than from Israel proper, in accordance with international recognition boundaries. The purpose of this labelling policy was to strengthen the EU's posture on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to provide European consumers with a clearer understanding of the origin of products.

Israel suspended its involvement in the Human Rights Working Group in response to the EU's interpretative notice, which obstructed the Association Council's (AC) returning to work, which had already been suspended for several years. In spite of this setback, both parties continued to engage in counter-terrorism dialogues, indicating a desire to preserve a collaborative relationship on security issues despite the tensions surrounding settlement policies.

Two years later, when the waters calmed down, there were several attempts to reconvene the Association Council, supposingly on February the 28th. EU Foreign Policy Chief Federica Mogherini and Israeli Regional Cooperation Minister Tzachi Hanegbi were the representatives who initiated such efforts in 2017. This would have led both entities to discuss new instruments of bilateral cooperation, like “partnership priorities”, among others. Nevertheless, these endeavours were ineffectual as a result of the unresolved issues surrounding Palestine.

⁹⁷ The report suggested that a “Special Privileged Partnership” with the EU could be advantageous for both Israel and a future Palestinian state, provided that an effective peace agreement is reached. / European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) Country Report 2013, European Union, 2013.

⁹⁸ European Commission, *Interpretative Notice on Indication of Origin of Goods from the Territories Occupied by Israel since June 1967*, European Union, 2015.

The *EU-Israel Euro-Mediterranean Aviation Agreement* was ratified by the European Parliament in June 2020, which marked a positive development in EU-Israeli relations by fostering cooperation in the aviation sector. The objective of this agreement was to enhance connectivity and cultivate economic relations between the EU and Israel by facilitating the opening of air travel routes⁹⁹.

Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi also initiated a significant shift in Israeli domestic policy that year, as Prime Minister Netanyahu's government withdrew its annexation plan from the political agenda. This action was interpreted as an attempt to re-establish diplomatic ties with the EU, which had been disrupted due to the annexation issue. Ashkenazi was designated as the sole non-European observer at an informal gathering of EU foreign ministers over the German presidency of the European Council (July to December 2020). This invitation put into light Israel's distinctive status as a partner in EU diplomacy, despite its non-member membership.

6.1. 2021-2022 – Hopeful horizons: boost to bilateral relations

In 2021, the European Commission and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs released the *Joint Communication on a Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood – A New Agenda for the Mediterranean*, adopted on February 9th, highlighted Israel as a “key partner for cooperation” in green and digital transitions and in promoting democratic governance, peace, security, and human development¹⁰⁰.

In July, Yair Lapid, then Alternate Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Israel, participated in an informal exchange with EU foreign ministers at the Foreign Affairs Council, marking a significant engagement. Furthermore, the *Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) – Global Europe*, launched for 2021-2027, aimed to increase Mediterranean dialogue, supporting Israel's multilateral relations and expanding agreements with Gulf states and Morocco. The NDICI-GE Regulation was adopted on 9 June 2021, came into force on 14 June 2021 and applied retroactively from 1 January 2021¹⁰¹.

⁹⁹ European Parliament. *Euro-Mediterranean Aviation Agreement between the EU and Israel*, European Union, 2020.

¹⁰⁰ European Commission, *Joint Communication on a Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood – A New Agenda for the Mediterranean*, Brussels: European Commission, February 9, 2021

¹⁰¹ European Union, *Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) – Global Europe*, Brussels: European Commission, June 9, 2021.

This diplomatic progress was further strengthened by high-level visits from EU officials in 2022. European Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Olivér Várhelyi visited Israel in March, and the European Investment Bank President (EIB) Werner Hoyer and his delegation, composed also of the Vice President and EIB financial experts, visited in May. Their discussions encompassed renewable energy, water treatment, and health-sector collaboration, with a particular emphasis on infectious disease research.

In May, Roberta Metsola, the President of the European Parliament, visited the Knesset to discuss the peace process, a two-state solution, and the EU's current antisemitism campaign. The European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, met with Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett the following month to discuss their shared priorities in energy and trade. They underscored their dedication to a secure and stable Middle East.

These developments paved the way for the Foreign Affairs Council's unanimous decision on 18 July to reconvene the Association Council. The Council ultimately convened on 3 October 2022, with a “common position” presented by all EU member states¹⁰², being this the 12th EU-Israel Association Council to take place.

Within this meeting, the EU's dedication to a comprehensive partnership with Israel was highlighted, which includes significant collaborations in energy, trade, research, and counter-terrorism¹⁰³. Mutual interests in energy security and regional stability were underscored by recent high-level visits and agreements, including the *EU-Israel-Egypt natural gas Memorandum of Understanding*¹⁰⁴.

In addition, the EU reiterated its commitment to a two-state solution in the Middle East Peace Process, while also transmitting concerns regarding the expansion of Israeli settlements and the rights of Palestinians¹⁰⁵. Israel's active involvement in Horizon Europe and Erasmus+ was recognised for its commitment to safeguarding freedom of religion and countering anti-Semitism, as well as for strengthening economic and cultural ties¹⁰⁶. The

¹⁰² Council of the European Union, “European Union's Position for the Association Council's 12th Meeting Held in Brussels on 3 October 2022”, Council of the European Union, published October 3, 2022, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/10/03/european-union-s-position-for-the-association-council-s-12th-meeting-held-in-brussels-on-3-october-2022/>.

¹⁰³ Council of the European Union, “European Union's Position”, 2022.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

EU underscored the necessity of ongoing dialogue and collaboration to sustain this partnership, particularly in the interest of promoting peace and stability in the region¹⁰⁷.

6.2. 2023-Present - Renewed uncertainties in the present and future of EU-Israeli relations

Due to an Israeli shift in government and regional conflict increasing in intensity, EU-Israel relations have been once again unstable in 2023. The EU's 8 May cancellation of its annual Europe Day event in Israel after a far-right Israeli minister had been scheduled to make an appearance showed its disapproval of Israel's new administration¹⁰⁸. Violence, especially in the Gaza Strip, escalated in the second half of the year, hurting relations, and which lasts until today.

However, the EU issued a formal statement on 8 October through the High Representative, expressing solidarity with Israel, in response to a significant attack on Israel in early October¹⁰⁹. The European Union condemned Hamas and affirmed Israel's right to self-defence in accordance with international law. Nevertheless, the statement was particularly cautious, abstaining from adopting a more expansive posture on Palestine. This underscores the EU's endeavour to preserve a balanced stance in the face of escalating regional tensions.

Additionally, the *European Council's conclusions on the Middle East situation*, published on 26 October, demonstrated the institution's continuing geopolitical interest and role in promoting stability while reacting to unfolding events in the region¹¹⁰. In addition to firmly condemning Hamas's attacks on Israel, it highlights the importance of civilian protection, and supports Israel's right to self-defence under international law¹¹¹.

¹⁰⁷ Council of the European Union, "European Union's Position", 2022.

¹⁰⁸ Tidey, A., "EU Mulls Cancelling Speeches at Europe Day Event in Israel Attended by Far-Right Minister", *Euronews*, 8 May 2023, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2023/05/08/eu-mulls-cancelling-speeches-at-europe-day-event-in-israel-attended-by-far-right-minister>.

¹⁰⁹ European Commission, "Statement by the High Representative on Behalf of the European Union on the Attacks against Israel", *Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations*, 8 October 2023, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/statement-high-representative-behalf-european-union-attacks-against-israel-2023-10-08_en.

¹¹⁰ European Council, "European Council Conclusions on Middle East, 26 October 2023", *Press Release*, 26 October 2023, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/10/26/european-council-conclusions-on-middle-east-26-october-2023/>.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

Within the statement, the Council expresses its grave concern about the escalating humanitarian crisis in Gaza and advocates for immediate access to aid and regional collaboration to guarantee that critical supplies are delivered to civilians. Alongside of it, it advocates for a revived political process in pursuit of a two-state solution and encourages the convening of an international peace conference. Furthermore, the Council emphasises the responsibility of (communication, online and offline) platforms to manage harmful content and demands for action against misinformation.

In summary, the EU's relationship with Israel is still complex and frequently challenging, as evidenced by this sequence of responses, which is influenced by internal policy considerations, changing geopolitical dynamics and instability within the MENA region.

3. CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS OF FUTURE

Israel's relationship with the EU has transformed into a unique cooperation association without formal membership status, despite its initial pursuit of full EU membership. This change acknowledges the challenges that impede full membership, which are primarily attributed to legal, cultural, and geopolitical intricacies; as well as a shift in public opinion, influenced by continuous contradictory changes of government and national strategies.

Maria Grazia Enardu emphasises that Israel's internal challenges, particularly its citizenship laws that categorise individuals based on religious identity rather than secular criteria, notably diverge from the EU's principles of universal civil law¹¹². Furthermore, Israel's potential congruence with the Copenhagen criteria is complicated, in the first place, by the absence of stability due to unrecognised borders with Syria, Lebanon, and “a future Palestinian state”. Indeed, clearly defined borders and solid connections with neighbouring countries are needed to make some progress in this sense¹¹³. As a result, the likelihood of Israel attaining full membership under the current circumstances remains low, despite the fact that Israel has made strides towards the EU in the areas of trade, research, and policy collaboration.

As Oded Eran and Shimon Stein have stressed, Israel-EU relations, regardless of the ongoing partnership, remain politically static as a result of unresolved conflicts and changing priorities within the European Parliament¹¹⁴. The Israeli-Palestinian peace process has become closely associated with EU-Israel relations for more than two decades, and discussions have been stuck, resulting in minimal progress¹¹⁵. The European Union's criticism of Israeli settlement policies and its growing support for liberal and green voices in the European Parliament have further strained bilateral relations, resulting in a greater dissonance between EU expectations and Israeli government policies, which damages relations and further prospects of integration.

¹¹² Enardu highlights a fundamental legislative concern with the Israeli citizenship regulations, which determine an individual's status based on their religious affiliation (Jewish, Muslim, Christian, or Druze) rather than a secular criterion. The Law of Return and associated laws are the most prominent representation of this system, which predominantly grants citizenship to Jews in line with religious precepts that differ significantly from the EU's standards for universal civil law.

¹¹³ Enardu, Maria Grazia. (2014). "Israele e Unione Europea: realtà e illusioni." *Studi Urbinati, A - Scienze Giuridiche, Politiche Ed Economiche*, 56(3), 515–525. <https://doi.org/10.14276/1825-1676.310>

¹¹⁴ Eran, Oded, & Stein, Shimon. (2019). *Israel and the New European Parliament: No Spring in the Offing*. Institute for National Security Studies.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

Israel and the EU are increasingly divided not only by policy but by foundational values and national identities, which are difficult, if not impossible, to overpass; as Michael Mertes observes¹¹⁶. Israel, initially founded with strong European influences, has shifted demographically and ideologically, blending Zionist principles with a focus on national sovereignty and self-defence, which contrasts with the EU's post-national orientation, where shared sovereignty is essential¹¹⁷. Moreover, the European Union's reluctance to adopt a robust stance on security contrasts with Israel's defence-oriented stance.

Further cultural distinctions that influence Israel-EU interactions have been analysed by Anat Bardi and Lilach Sagiv, who point out that Israel prioritises hierarchy, embeddedness, and mastery whereas the EU prioritises equality, autonomy, and harmony. They demonstrate how these variations affect issues like economic development, environmental regulations, and human rights by applying Schwartz's theory of cultural values¹¹⁸. For example, EU cultures prioritise equality and harmony and give a higher priority on sustainable development, whereas Israel's hierarchy and mastery ideals encourage reliance on formal regulations and the strategic use of resources. Israel's distinct approach to environmental exploitation, which frequently diverges from European values for conservation, can also be explained by its low priority on harmony; authors state.

Bardi and Sagiv come to the conclusion that these cultural differences may influence how Israel and the EU cooperate in the future since situational circumstances, such as shifting demography, have an impact on values over time, which influences policy alignment and mutual understanding¹¹⁹. Additionally, in this sense, as Mertes concludes, all these divergences have contributed to a paradoxical relationship in which Israel finds itself ideologically and politically distant from the EU despite shared liberal and economic values¹²⁰. In the end, the eventuality of Israel not pursuing real membership, at least at the moment, should also be considered, related to the importance the Jewish nation gives to staying independent as a security issue.

¹¹⁶ Mertes, Michael. (2015). *Uneasy Neighbours: The EU and Israel – A Paradoxical Relationship*. In G. Wahlers (Ed.), *Germany and Israel: 50 Years of Diplomatic Relations* (pp. 39-60). Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Bardi, Anat, & Lilach Sagiv. (2003). "The EU and Israel: Comparison of Cultures and Implications." In *Israel and Europe*, edited by Klaus Boehnke, 41–58. Deutscher Universitätsverlag. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-322-81262-9_3.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Mertes, "Uneasy Neighbours", 39-60.

Indeed, Rafael Barak, a former member of the Israeli diplomatic service, disputes the possibility of Israel becoming an official member of the EU¹²¹. This negative stance is the result of exhaustive consultations and is indicative of various kinds of practical and ideological concerns.

First of all, Israel was founded to guarantee a secure homeland for the Jewish people, whose identity as an ethnic and religious community remains fundamental to the state's ethos, as Barak observes¹²². In contrast to the EU's principle of free movement, which is one of the four fundamental liberties of the Union, Israel prioritises controlled movement across its borders to preserve its Jewish identity and security. Barak underscores that the unrestricted access of all EU citizens would present a fundamental challenge to Israel's identity, a concern that extends beyond conventional security concerns and directly addresses national ideology¹²³.

Furthermore, EU-Israeli relations have been marked by substantial tensions, particularly in relation to EU stances on the Palestinian issue, since the Oslo Accords and prior diplomatic discussions, including the Venice Declaration. Barak notes the fact that Israel's scepticism regarding the EU's frequently critical posture has damaged public perceptions on the relation with Europe. Although some Israelis advocate for stronger relationships, others are apprehensive, fearing that EU criticism could compromise Israel's security objectives¹²⁴. Certainly, the Israeli government's primary objective is to guarantee the security of its citizens, as emphasised by Barak and other authors contacted for this thesis (such as Gabay¹²⁵).

Even if all this frequently determines the government's position on EU-related issues, such as membership discussions, as we have seen, scientific, economic, and cultural ties persist as valuable components of the EU-Israel “special status” partnership.

Additionally, outside of the scope of this thesis, it is crucial to comprehend the role of external powers, including the United States and Russia, in order to comprehend present relations and their future developments, given the deeply interconnected nature of

¹²¹ Barak, Rafael, interview by author, October 28, 2024.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Gabay, Omer, interview by author, October 8, 2024.

EU-Israel relations with the broader geopolitical landscape. Research should consider the impact of these dynamics on the stability of the Middle East, as the EU continues to be Israel's primary trading partner. Mertes argues that the EU perceives itself as an impartial mediator in regional disputes¹²⁶; nonetheless, the trajectory of EU-Israeli relations is still being influenced by influential allies such as the United States, as Gabay underlines¹²⁷.

Despite it all, the future of EU-Israeli relations is promising, particularly in the areas of energy, science, and technology cooperation. Nevertheless, energy collaboration poses both opportunities and challenges. Professor Zahavi emphasised that, despite the public's support for Israel's Ministry of Energy, the practical implementation is hindered by financial and geographic complications¹²⁸. These initiatives are frequently referred to as “phoenix projects” as they resurface periodically but encounter setbacks as a result of technical difficulties¹²⁹.

Science and Research & Development cooperation is a critical element in the discussion of the future of EU-Israeli relations, too, as stated. The concept of science diplomacy, as defined by João Mourato Pinto in his “fourth definition”, transcends conventional international relations by recognising science as a critical tool to foster regional stability and global collaboration¹³⁰. The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is particularly influenced by the EU's science diplomacy strategy, which is combined with soft power instruments such as higher education (HEI), research, and innovation cooperation. Here, shared historical and cultural connections foster mutual understanding and reconcile gaps, even in the face of ideological differences, including national security and identity, as detailed above.

The military and security field is a complex yet promising area for prospective EU-Israeli collaboration. Despite the substantial condemnation of Israel's military industry from certain European divisions, NATO member states are becoming more interested in Israel's advanced defence technology, including laser systems, which have become particularly pertinent in the context of ongoing conflicts such as the crisis in Ukraine; Zahavi states¹³¹.

¹²⁶ Mertes, “Uneasy Neighbours”, 39-60.

¹²⁷ Gabay, Omer, 2024.

¹²⁸ Zahavi, Hila, interview by author, October 22, 2024.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Mourato Pinto, João, interview by author, October 11, 2024.

¹³¹ Zahavi, Hila, 2024.

Israel's strategic location and advanced technology render it a potential centre for Europe's next-generation defence systems, indeed.

A coordinated defence strategy, which would need alignment on shared threats such as global terrorism, antisemitism, or terrorist-defined organisations, would be mandatory for the prospective establishment of an EU army, supported eventually by Israeli, and consequently U.S. expertise. Europe may be compelled to establish more robust, independent defence relationships with Israel as a result of changes in NATO dynamics, particularly those that occur under a new U.S. administration. It would be necessary to establish distinct mutual adversaries, devise coordinated defence strategies, and balance European humanitarian and peace-keeping principles with the pragmatism and practicality of military action in order to achieve such cooperation.

Lastly, Professor Hila Zahavi and Joao Mourato Pinto contend that the soft power potential of higher education and research cooperation in EU-Israel relations is still to be fully explored and utilised. Zahavi considers Israel's liberal educational and academic system as a critical platform for promoting international perspectives and open discussions¹³². Nevertheless, obstacles persist: the political positions of EU Member states can impede support, and Israel's citizens' ability to engage in international affairs is influenced by its ongoing security challenges. The EU may increase its investment in Israeli higher education cooperation if the region shifts towards peace, according to Zahavi¹³³. However, its primary focus remains on closer regions such as Moldova and Ukraine, at least by now.

Despite the fact that these developments are already taking place, the relationship between the EU and Israel has always been contentious. Dialogue and cooperation have become intricate by Israel's marginalisation of the EU in the peace process, its distrust of specific European policies and the EU's stance on the Palestinian question, as described above, despite its wish to be incorporated into the European project.

In accordance with it, the decade-long absence of political cooperation and dialogue as a result of the conflict and regional instability has undoubtedly exposed the system's vulnerabilities. In order to prevent a recurrence of paralysis and to promote political dialogue in additional domains, the EU should revise this model and implement a more

¹³² Zahavi, Hila, interview by author, October 22, 2024.

¹³³ Zahavi, Hila, 2024.

robust one that provides additional guarantees, despite political differences (e.g., by establishing a dedicated institution for the Peace Process).

Additionally, it is necessary to revise other extant cooperation instruments, including the numerous agreements. It should be noted that they continue to depend on the 2005 Action Plan, despite the fact that the priorities have shifted.

Furthermore, the EU should reintroduce subjects such as human rights into the discourse. In a democracy such as Israel, the use of violence at this intensity is unacceptable. Rather than concentrating solely on economic and scientific collaboration, the EU should establish a framework for genuine confrontation with Israel in the realm of political and security issues, also in order to influence and push Israel to stop expansionist, colonialist policies, as they have been defined both by experts and the public opinion, and war.

In spite of the recent improvement in political relations between the two, the recent ascension of Binyamin Netanyahu to the Knesset as head of government, which has resulted in a moderate coalition, has once again led to uncertainty and further regress in EU-Israeli relations. However, it is expected that the EU will be able to leverage the opportunity presented by Lapid to establish a robust foundation that will not impede the potential for positive political relations between the Jewish state and the Union, irrespective of future events.

7.1. Key areas for further research

As this study comes to a close, it is useful to suggest topics for additional research that can deepen our comprehension of the evolving EU-Israel partnership. Examining the historical, political, and strategic aspects of this connection might offer a broader perspective on their collaboration, especially considering the scarcity of current research in this area.

The influence of shared historical events, culture and identity on current EU-Israeli relations is a significant area for further research. This investigation could examine the cultural and political significance that Israel possesses within the EU framework, as well as the ways in which these connections influence both symbolic and practical connections. Furthermore, analysis of Israel's potential for EU membership, especially in comparison to

cases such as Ukraine and Turkey, might provide insight into the distinctive criteria, challenges, and potential pathways for integration that may arise over time.

Furthermore, the examination of the impact of external actors, including the United States, Russia, and key Middle Eastern countries, would provide valuable insights into the stability of the wider region and the relationship between the EU and Israel. Research could investigate the impact of US mediation on EU-Israeli relations and the influence of American policies on EU diplomatic activities. The EU's regional diplomacy is made more complex by Russia's advantageous position in the region, in particular in Syria, Lebanon, and among Iranian-backed groups, which shall be studied, too.

In addition, an examination of the roles and duties of other regional actors, such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey, could enhance comprehension of Israel's position within the bigger picture of Middle Eastern stability. Findings of such studies would illuminate the potential for long-term peace and collaboration between the EU and Israel, as well as the influence of alliances and rivalry.

The function of EU institutions beyond the European Commission, European Parliament, and EU Council in shaping these relations is another dimension that is worth exploring. Understanding the specific contributions of entities such as the European External Action Service (EEAS) could provide a deeper understanding of the ways in which these institutions interact to either facilitate or frustrate EU-Israel engagement.

Moreover, when it comes to potential areas of interest, for example, the European Court of Justice (ECJ) could be studied for its impact on economics and trade policy, particularly in the context of its rulings on matters such as trade regulations and product labelling, which have had an impact on economic relations between the EU and Israel. The European Investment Bank (EIB) is another potential institution that has provided funding for substantial initiatives in the EU's neighbouring countries and could, should be studied. The evaluation of its function may clarify the impact of financial incentives on regional stability and cooperation, particularly in the context of joint EU-Israeli infrastructure (e.g., energy facilities) or environmental efforts.

Specific sub-sections of the European Commission could be an object of study, too. For instance, the Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, which supervises Horizon Europe and encourages international collaboration in research and technology, could also

conduct a more thorough examination of science diplomacy. Their participation is particularly pertinent in light of the increasing significance of science diplomacy as a conduit for more profound EU-Middle East engagement, with Israel serving as an important collaborator in the fields of innovation and technology.

In fact, science diplomacy is one of the most promising avenues for long-term, sustainable collaboration, as this study shows, and it shall be investigated by the academic community, particularly in the context of EU-Israel relations, but not only. This discipline, which is consistent with the EU's overarching goal of fostering stability in the Middle East through scientific collaboration, relies on the belief that “science is (a pathway to understanding) truth, and so the future is in science”. Science may not be capable of expressing “truth” in a definitive, unchangeable form; however, it offers the most trustworthy and effective approach to understanding the complex, multifaceted nature of reality. The investigation of EU-Israeli relations serves, indeed, as an illustration of the potential of science for uncovering valuable insights within intricate political and cultural interactions.

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Gabay, Omer, interview by author, October 8, 2024.

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Mourato Pinto, João, interview by author, October 11, 2024.

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9. ANNEX

9.1. Interview transcriptions

Including short biography and key insights and topics treated during the interviews.

a. **BARAK, Rafael, interview by author, October 28, 2024.**

Mr Barak is a veteran diplomat who previously held the positions of Israel's ambassador to Canada and Directorate General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He also served as an Assistant throughout the Oslo process. PhD candidate at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (Israel) specialising in science diplomacy.

Main insights and highlights:

- The importance of science and its dual function in Israel's security policy, diplomacy, and national development.
- Israeli usage of scientific diplomacy to build early ties with recently emancipated countries in Asia and Africa (in the period of decolonisation).
- Economic benefits from Framework Programs: Israel as one of the primary receivers of R&D funding.
- Possible issues with EU membership and identity, as well as geopolitical obstacles to further integration.

Science diplomacy (SD; general insights)

In the past, Americans used science diplomacy to advance Europe, promote Euratom, and create a chapter of the Marshall Plan on science. It was already "discovered" following World War II, particularly in terms of technology, which included the atomic bomb at the end of the conflict. It was very well understood by Americans. We made the most of what we had to create. We cannot accomplish the work in Israel (now 10 million, when we started with 2.5 million; when Israel was created, 260K, in one year, 1 million due to migrants) because of small nations, lack of large laboratories, and the need to collaborate with the outside world. Despite this, the scientific community continued to receive funding, and Ben-Gurion and Herzl were well aware of this.

Countries that remain independent must exercise prudence, particularly in the area of science. First of all, because of defence, after national development. “The obligation of a leader is to keep the country safe and then to develop it”.

We have good friends, especially Americans, even if we have security challenges. However, we are working to build new friendships in order to receive more and offer us what we need.

- Seminars of science diplomacy

One crucial element was that there was no universally accepted definition of science diplomacy.

Why don't diplomats write about SD? The majority of those who write on scientific diplomacy are scientists. Why does it occur? By using science as a means of fostering partnerships with several nations, Israel was able to take advantage over those who had it, those who did not go ahead with other things.

Diplomats say that there is/was no true diplomacy in water, medicine, science, etc. In a way, liberal and democratic nations write about academic freedom and scientists' interests in sharing their discoveries. Social media and science have been in intense competition during the last 10 years. Reasonability of scientific policies: populism, also in some European nations; scientists now contend with social media, where everyone believes that everyone has the right to everything. Instead of turning to tales, SD reacts to scientists by attempting to enforce the truth or the most suitable solution to the problems, and not to go to narratives. That is the biggest challenge.

The absence of diplomats and the competition between social media and SD in some ways encourage scientists to influence and assume significant roles in politics. (In democratic and liberal countries).

Israel's relationship between science and diplomacy

Israeli diplomats use the scientific community's level to improve their image, and Israeli scientists use Israeli diplomats to establish themselves in local communities. The first nation to join the framework program in 1994 (now called Horizon) as an "associated member" was Israel.

From 1964, Israel started collaboration with Euratom, which was formed by 12 European members; and since 2013 is a formal member. The President of the Committee of Service is an Israeli scientist.

The project, which started with diplomats seeking cooperation, was not an official strategy. Representatives travelled to Israel in the early 1950s and 1960s to learn about the country's development policies in response to requests from developing nations. As leaders of socialist-leaning governments tried to learn how Israel's experience could help them, early ties were established with African and Asian nations, including Burma. In 1958, Israel established links with Ghana and then 32 African nations south of the Sahara during this time of decolonisation in Africa and Asia.

Given Israel's years of isolation as a result of the 1948 war and the Arab boycott, diplomacy was essential. Israeli diplomats aggressively sought to build partnerships with nations throughout the world, first with the US, then the EU, the Soviet Union in 1953, and finally with Latin American countries. More connections were sparked when the movement of decolonisation started in 1958.

Israel's scientific attempts led to its fast development in just ten years. Since its founding, Israel has worked to use science to solve regional and global problems, such as the "Jewish problem"—an effort to combat antisemitism and provide a homeland for Jews on their ancestral territory. The founding of organisations such as Hebrew University in 1925 and the growth of research institutes devoted to engineering and agriculture demonstrate how important science was to this evolution. With scientists established a scientific division in the army as early as 1947 and offering crucial support for military issues, Israel was prepared to extend these efforts by 1948. When then, scientific advancement and national security were more closely related, particularly when an arms embargo in 1967 underscored Israel's need for technical independence.

The first of many joint projects between Israeli and European scientists was Euratom, which started scientific cooperation with Europe in 1959.

Why aren't science diplomacy tactics more well-known?

Israel makes an effort to keep it a secret, but there are no mysteries there. Israelis didn't discuss it since, in a sense, nuclear-related topics were prohibited. It is important to

emphasise that Euratom is not a military nuclear organisation; rather, it has attempted to advance nuclear energy for the benefit of the general population. Collaboration grew in the fields of nuclear energy, fishing, medicine, agriculture, and water desalination.

Overcoming political limitations through science diplomacy

We are still members of the framework program, and have yet to receive our investment back (from the 4th). Since then, revenues 11-12-15% are coming from investment, R&C top five in different periods of financing. Most of the labs were established in Israel.

The 4th Framework was of about 95 billion euros, the largest research framework in the world for the Israeli Ministry of Finance, which invests in universities.

The US is the first relationship development; PhDs are sent there. The European framework is the main one upon returning.

It is challenging and bureaucratic, but ultimately, it is the launch of the Nobel Prize.

Forecast for industrial components that might play a significant role in this matter.

Possibility of Israel to join the EU as an official member

This inquiry has been posed several times by Israel's diplomatic service, and the current response is no. Closer as possible to Europe in many fields, no members.

The nation was created to provide a solution to the Jewish people's perilous situation, they were already stressed. However, from the 4 freedoms of the European Union, Israel does not agree with the freedom of movement entirely, it is a question mark, due to an ideological reason instead of a security concern. The State is Jewish, which is considered as a race, an ethnic group. If we give free entrance to every European, what will happen to the Jewish State? It is a question of identity, it goes against the essence of Europe, a place for all the people.

After Oslo, some politicians raised the question, but immediately they said this was not in the agenda. It is more of giving assistance to developing countries, but the answer was not sufficient, now other elements are needed to stop this immigration. This was raised in Israel years before, created as a small state surrounded by enemy countries. The concept of a “Jewish nation to the Jewish (people)” was important, it still is.

Since the Venice Declaration, Brussels' political position has been quite confrontational. Oslo accords in 1993 and policy on the Palestinian issue are still up for debate. Israelis are split: they give it a go, get criticism, and now there are no answers after what occurred. We must find a solution (personal suggestion). Optimism follows a resolution to the Palestine question.

b. DI GIOACCHINO Ariela, interview by author, October 16, 2024.

Mrs. Di Gioacchino is currently a Policy Officer of the European Union of Jewish Students. Student of a MA in International Relations: Security, Crime and Justice at the University of Bologna, and graduated in Governance and International Relations at the Tor Vergata University. She has participated in international mobilities in Venice, Tel Aviv, Reichman University (Israel), and Syracuse (USA).

Main insights and highlights:

- The role of Jewish students organisations in promoting EU-Israel relations and intercultural exchange
- Concerns about the rise of antisemitism in Europe and the role of student unions in order to fight it
- EU-wide strategies to combat antisemitism and create safe spaces for Jews, students and beyond
- Encouragement of positive dialogue and interactions between the EU and Israel while evaluating Israeli government policy

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The European Union of Jewish Students (EUJS) advocates for young Jewish professionals and students between the ages of 18 and 35, and represents student unions in numerous countries. In close collaboration with the European Commission, the Office of the Coordinator for Combating Antisemitism, and two other partner groups, it acts as a European platform to assist and advocate for these organisations, according to their needs. With a core team of about ten individuals and a Board of volunteers connecting online, EUJS operates as a diaspora-focused organisation that works to advance Jewish life throughout Europe.

Focusing on safety, inclusion, and future development, EUJS actively fights antisemitism and advances a vision of Jewish life in Europe. One of EUJS's main objectives is to encourage the adoption and application of national and EU-wide antisemitic strategies, and that young Jews can interact more comfortably on campuses and in public places. It helps people to meet, to explore the reality.

According to reports from member groups, there are a lot of struggles. Unions are also different: certain unions are more involved in politics (like in France), while others concentrate on social and cultural activities. EUJS acknowledges the importance of active participation: if they don't take that place, someone else will. Struggles have escalated in nations including Spain, Italy, and the Netherlands, while antisemitic events have sharply increased since October 7, especially in France. Because of the verbal and physical abuse, several students have even thought about switching institutions. They also see that those who voice opinions on a two-state solution, or different opinions on the conflict, are frequently excluded from non-Jewish groups, including feminist, LGBTQI+, and environmental organisations.

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of “antisemitism”, which the EU Youth Forum and EUJS have embraced, has been helpful in directing discussion without restricting the right to free speech. However, there are issues with defining “Zionism”, which is sometimes misinterpreted as being the same as colonialism or white supremacy. Understanding Zionism as the Jewish right to self-determination and a connection to their homeland—a right that is generally recognised for other groups—is what EUJS promotes.

To promote interfaith and intercultural understanding, the Unione Giovani Ebrei d'Italia (UGEI) in Italy works with non-Jewish institutions. Moreover, for example, a board member in Padova tries to encourage open dialogues while recognising the complexity of the ongoing debate and avoiding divisive language.

EUJS is a European group that focuses on promoting Jewish life throughout Europe. Despite having a Zionist bent, it is independent of the Israeli government and continues to hold a critical view of certain of its actions. In order to highlight the value of sustaining ties and aiding the Jewish diaspora, EUJS interacts with the Israeli Embassy, while

maintaining a critical position towards the government. With the Ministry of the Diaspora today they have no contact with them, just with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Additionally, EUJS engages with the European Commission and advocates for cultural interaction, urging Israel and the EU to cooperate and stressing the value of such relationships over boycott-promoting policies that, according to EUJS, obstruct candid communication and possible solutions.

c. EUROPEAN JEWISH CONGRESS, interview by author, October 9, 2024.

Decided to keep anonymous for security reasons, due to the latest wave of antisemitism in Europe. They actually work at the organisation as Policy Officer.

Main insights and highlights:

- Identity Differences: illustrating the (identity) differences between Hebrew and Jewish identity in Israel-EU Relations.
- Addressing anti-Semitism, which is often mistaken for anti-Zionism.
- Various EU Positions to deal with, EU-Israel accords are complicated by differing member-state perspectives.

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ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPTION (IN SPANISH):

Contexto: el European Jewish Congress (EJC) y otras organizaciones

Israel. También existen el European Leadership Network, la European Coalition for Israel (judíos y cristianos evangélicos, que apoyan a Israel dentro del Parlamento Europeo) y otras organizaciones, como la European Union of Jewish Students. Estas tienen diferentes caracteres políticos.

Retos de las relaciones entre la Unión Europea e Israel

- Conflicto inicial, entre los dos distintos conceptos esenciales: el judaísmo y el hebreo. Judaísmo cultural-histórico - debate: qué representa el judaísmo? Etnicidad, religión? EJC contribuye a la difusión de definiciones precisas.*

*Haira: batalla por preservar la memoria del Holocausto. Definición del antisemitismo (aceptada por todos a excepción de Irlanda y Malta); en qué circunstancias mencionar al Estado de Israel constituye antisemitismo. Clásico AS (Eclesiástica, expulsión; diáspora judía).

- El antisemitismo se oculta bajo la apariencia de un antisionismo.
- Relación compleja, cada nación miembro posee una perspectiva muy diferente.

Aparte del conflicto presente, existen diversos acuerdos, como el Acuerdo de Asociación, rápida reunión entre líderes estatales, reunión conjunta entre los ministros de exteriores. Guerra a gran escala entre Von Der Layen y Borrel. ¿Presencia o posterior a la Comisión? La que se presenta ahora no tiene un gran interés en el tema del Medio Oriente.

Kibuzim que Hamas atacó: las comunidades más izquierdistas de Israel, respaldando lazos con palestinos en contra del gobierno de Netanyahu y las políticas de colonización. Europa tiene una perspectiva prejuiciosa, fallecimiento de civiles palestinos; sin embargo, también: circunstancia de desequilibrio. Los puntos de respaldo a Netanyahu no sufrieron ataques de Hamas. Después de 7/10, numerosos progresistas cambiaron de rumbo.

- Critique a las colonias en Cisjordania. Son un obstáculo para el futuro pacto de paz.

En realidad, es un enfrentamiento desigual, pero la batalla geopolítica en el Medio Oriente está presente. Iran: milicias respaldadas por Iran (NO miedo al Estado de Israel), y Hamas con menos poder - no considera que posea la capacidad de aniquilar a Israel. ¿Reacción excesiva o proporcional?

UE pérdida: conflicto relacionado con las Naciones Unidas. Sin embargo, la UE continúa siendo un club de naciones - no van a dejar de lado a Georgia (Jordania). Debate moral, simbólico. America, Rusia? A China no le interesa, no tiene interés político, solo intereses comerciales y económicos.

A nivel económico, la UE es el principal aliado comercial de Israel. Consejo de Seguridad, ¿verdad? Borrell puede expresar numerosas ideas, pero no posee influencia sobre la arquitectura europea, no desea comprometer su soberanía. Por el contrario,

La Unión Europea proporciona la mayor ayuda financiera a la autoridad palestina; sin embargo, los países miembros comercializan con Israel. Armas enviadas a las

organizaciones insurgentes desde Rusia e Irán (en contra de Israel). Irán proporciona armas bélicas a Rusia durante el conflicto ucraniano; provocando desestabilización en la región.

Zelenski recibió una crítica severa con el 7/10 y deseaba visitar a Israel: Israel lo rechazó debido a que Rusia posee bases militares en Siria. ¿Rusia está muy silenciosa con Bashar Al-Assad? Soporte a los insurgentes. Israel está favoreciendo a Arabia Saudi (debido a la guerra fría entre ellos e Irán, mediante representantes).

Apoyo a Palestina - protestas pro-palestina ante sinagogas (por ejemplo, Melilla): en Francia, violaron a una joven replicando lo que ocurrió el 7/10 por judías sionistas; incendiaron una sinagoga en Francia con la bandera palestina. Es complicado para un judío no convertirse en un radical sionista - no contemplar el dolor de los demás.

Documento relevante para el tema della mia ricerca: “Estrategia para combatir el antisemitismo” (2021) - Coordinadora Catarina Von Schurbein desde 2015.

Gasolina - Tuberías Israel-Azerbaijan. Energy cooperation and science diplomacy will be the future when we work together.

Euro Criticismo: no accesible, la meritocracia no opera. Es crucial que haya naciones que no se asesinen. Es imprescindible que sea más sencillo y comprensible para los 600 millones de individuos que residen en Europa. Elite que está en constante cambio. Para acceder a ciertas áreas jerárquicas, después pierdes credibilidad.

ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

- Initial conflict, between the two different essential concepts: Judaism and Hebrew. Cultural-historical Judaism - debate: what does Judaism represent? Ethnicity, religion? EJC contributes to the dissemination of precise definitions.

*Haira: battle to preserve the memory of the Holocaust. Definition of anti-Semitism (accepted by all except Ireland and Malta); under what circumstances mentioning the State of Israel constitutes anti-Semitism. Classic AS (Ecclesiastical, expulsion; Jewish diaspora).

- Anti-Semitism hides under the guise of anti-Zionism.
- Complex relationship, each member nation has a very different perspective.

Apart from the present conflict, there are various agreements, such as the Association Agreement, rapid meeting between state leaders, joint meeting between foreign ministers. Full-scale war between Von Der Layen and Borrel - pre- or post-Commission? The one that is being presented now does not have a great interest in the Middle East.

Kibuzim that Hamas attacked: Israel's most left-wing communities, backing ties with Palestinians against Netanyahu's government and settlement policies. Europe has a prejudiced perspective, Palestinian civilian deaths; however, also: circumstance of imbalance. Netanyahu's support points were not attacked by Hamas. After 7/10, many progressives changed course.

There are different fundamental concepts of identity between Jew and Hebrew that influence relations. This includes Judaism as a culture and history and the discussion of its definition as a religion or ethnicity. The EJC is also concerned with preserving the memory of the Holocaust and supports the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of anti-Semitism, which has been adopted by almost all EU countries (with the exception of Ireland and Malta). This definition clarifies when criticism of Israel falls under anti-Semitism, and historical anti-Semitism is often disguised as anti-Zionism.

Each EU member country has its own view on the relationship with Israel, which complicates arrangements, although the EU-Israel Association Agreement remains a key basis. At the upcoming summit between the two blocs' foreign ministers, these issues will be discussed. Recent violence in progressive Israeli kibbutzim has led some quarters to reconsider their stance towards the Israeli government and settlements in the West Bank, which represent an obstacle to future peace.*

* With marked differences between Ursula von der Leyen and Josep Borrell. Recent violence in progressive Israeli kibbutzim has led some quarters to reconsider their stance towards the Israeli government and settlements in the West Bank, which represent an obstacle to future peace.

Globally, the EU is Israel's main trading partner and its main supplier of aid to the Palestinian Authority, while some member states also sell arms to Israel. However, these supplies are often a source of controversy due to Iranian and Russian-backed militias in the region. In the current situation, the EU and Borrell in particular face constraints in taking

strong positions due to its political architecture and commitment to member state sovereignty.

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d. GABAY, Omer, interview by author, October 8, 2024.

Mr. Gabay is an Israeli Software Engineer, currently employed in Ziprecruiter, one of the main US big tech companies established in Israel, a platform for job seekers. He previously studied in Padova, Italy, as an incoming student, through the Erasmus+ mobility scheme, during the 2021-2022 Academic Year.

Main insights and highlights:

- Israel's strongest connection with the US, rather than the EU, even if developing ties, esp. in tech, unlikely to get/request EU membership
- Internal and external political challenges Israel needs to face
- Israel: an example of innovation development for global influence

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Personal initial remarks

Not being part of day-to-day operations, nor the Army, life is pretty the same. The only thing that has changed is that there is more than one front, more alarms than in the past, for missiles. Living 30 minutes away from Tel Aviv, in the centre of Israel, alarms just ring when Iran is involved.

Israel has the best technology for missile defence, to intercept many of them. They know where-when it will activate, they know the region it might fall into. The most important thing for Israel is to keep citizens safe. From October 7th, those next to the border were evacuated, some left Israel, being these families, children became orphan, etc. There was a wave of migration outside of Israel, people are moving to other countries.

(Overview of the region). Hamas is the existent military organisation in Gaza, a proxy of Iran, Hezbollah in Lebanon. They supply weapons. Israel and Iran fight for dominance.

Israel tried to stop the nuclear programme in Iran, and there was a “pacific war”. There is a problem from Yemen too, the “Houthi” movement. Nevertheless, Israel is hopeful that we will have a better future. Lebanese people deserve normal welfare, this war will benefit them. “A terrorist organisation is founded by ideas”.

The effect of trauma in Israeli(s) (mentality)

The problem is that people do not want Israel to exist after 50 years. Resilience in this war, supplying even enemies.

October 7th is an important date to the Israeli people. Weak, most sensitive point of the Israelis: hostages. It is the best way of getting something from Israel. Biggest kidnapping in history, some people are still trapped in Gaza, and Israel is not able to bring hostages home alive.

For example, Gilad Shalit was kidnapped during his mandatory military service, next to the border of Gaza. After 5 years of a situation that was worsening, they released many hostages from Hamas. It is a problem for security, and Israel is to take a high price to save lives. Even Yahya Sinwar, leader of Hamas. The youngest hostage is less than 1 year old. More or less, there are a bit more than 100.

Israel holds a population of almost 10 million people, the majority being Jewish, but there are also many Arabs who are successful. You get Arab citizenship by living in Israel, there are around 2 million Arabs at the moment. Their situation depends. Unlike the Palestinians, they condemn the 7/10 attacks and support the Israelis. Arabs don't serve in the military, the ones that have citizenship usually don't want to serve the army. There are also Arab doctors, software engineers... Most of them enjoy a good life.

Development on EU-Israel relations in the next months/years

From a strategic point of view, Israel is a better place now, less threads around. In the next few years, there will be war between the two giants. Iran has the puppies, Lebanon makes Lebanese people miserable.

Iran vs Israel - many reasons to eliminate nuclear weapons (main threat on Israel). Israel has very advanced technology, but not for nuclear. Jordan, Saudi Arabia... - Iran attacks

them, the EU. Normalisation of other countries with Israel also took place through the Abraham accords. Israel hopes that they would recognise them and make peace.

Power or peace (in relation to the Palestinian conflict)

With Palestine - because of the attacks, no giving concessions. Palestinians are dependent on the Israeli economy. Dangerous to let Palestinians enter. HIS HOPE: Palestinians to have a better education. They are taught that Israel should not exist. They cannot pause the thread to Israel. Learn in the schools not to hate.

Arabs many times don't agree with each other. Israel is a common enemy easy to hate (Scapegoat theory). Israel is a country where many people can live successful lives, even Arab citizens enjoy this right; but the West bank always has some clashes - far from Tel Aviv. Part of it will be autonomous, not belonging to Israel or Palestine, esp. Judea (the word Jew comes from there, Jerusalem is there).

Possibility of Israel to join the EU as an official member

Israel becoming a EU country? NO. It has better relations with the US, maybe Israel would become a State. It is much different from European countries: intense belief in war, people have a sense of purpose of doing good to the country, and responsibility towards the nations... Israelis work hard, not layoffs, and it is more stressful. Free economy, working long hours. In some aspects, doing better than the EU, in tech especially.

The leaders of Europe believe that they are very violent. Germany is doing regulation against some statements. Moreover, many people believe that Israel has no right to exist, before it was founded Nazi would exterminate it.

Israelis have very different opinions. The country will see a younger leadership soon. There is much criticism. How did we get to this point? We let people invade us, rape women (8/10 - biggest attack on the history of Israel). Furthermore, Israel has a complicated political system: if you don't get a majority, you can form coalitions. We need to change how elections work. It is not very democratic. Ultra Orthodox are not a majority but they help the government, they need them to form a government.

We are very different from our neighbours. We get a good education, since we created it. We represent a successful minority in the world. A lot of power from a small nation.

Enough to make people hate us. Jewish people that live in the US have a lot of power, the US is the most important nation.

Involvement of Israel in EU policies and programmes

Israel has the most connections with the US, investors in America; with them Israel will always collaborate more. It also depends on the number of tech companies, the more they are, the more connections are created. Even if some try to impose sanctions, Israel is needed by the EU, as the other way around. People have shown short-term memory. We are not at the point where the EU sanctions Israel, just publicly in the news.

“Europe cannot be without Israel nor Israel without Europe”.

Final remarks

- You receive what others want you to think from the news.
- Europe should be a place of trust for Jews, Jewish people should have faith in Europe. A large number of families are from Arab nations. You can see why it was made if you go to Israel.
- We in Israel will never forget the hostages in Gaza.

e. ZAHAVI, Hila, interview by author, October 22, 2024.

Director of the Simone Veil Research Centre for Contemporary European Studies and Academic Teacher of the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. For 4 years, she was Teaching Coordinator and lecturer at the Open University of Israel. She was also Secretary General of the Israeli Association for International Studies. Post-doctoral studies on Higher Education in the EU (Israel-EU) by the University of Toronto - Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy.

Main insights and highlights:

- The important role and possibilities of research and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the advancement of EU-Israeli relations
- Engagement obstacles driven by Israel's trauma, which affects open dialogue and involvement, as well as national restraints of certain EU members
- Opportunities vs geographical and political obstacles in the EUROMED initiative
- Israel as home to the biggest innovation and defence cluster in the EU

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EU-Israel in the field of Higher Education

Higher Education and Research are very important for understanding. The EU must have good intensive relations on that track, with any relevant partner, esp. those who have liberal education systems, like Israel. When you talk with academics with no liberal, no democratic systems, it is hard; but Israel is open, liberal, therefore a platform for discussion, better understanding the globe from another perspective.

In the EU things are good, but under attack from the national and regional level from different political levels. E.g., Spain, Italy..., the EU is the sum of all the members, if they are not in that line it might change.

On the Israeli side, there are two threats:

- National level in some member countries in the EU, against expanding the relations. Daily life (in Israel) is very hard, e.g., sirens all over Israel, bombs in the sky, rockets falling near their houses... Even if the situation in Gaza is much more severe, no equivalency, but in order to demonstrate that the Israelis are not so emotionally cognitively available to work on anything. Surviving play. From your point of view, a big monster cries for help; but this all really affects the cognitive state, how available we are to work on things, to see things in a different way...
- Availability of the Israeli side, how Israelis find it very hard to engage. Hard for the Israelis to see a bigger picture, outside of them. Many Israelis are not so open and empathetic or discuss any criticism - this is unwelcomed, it is creating blocks. Response to invitations: not emotionally available to talk about their personal story and then have a demonstration in front of them. Not available to confront the reality yet, talking just with whom is having the conversation under control. Hard to confront these voices. "I am still in the trauma", not killing it.

If more critical players see Israel and the region going into a more positive direction, to a more peaceful solution and more diplomatic ways, less violent solutions, it is possible that the EU invests in HEI.

But they are more occupied with what happens in Moldova, Ukraine; closer geographically, more relevant for the EU. Southern neighbourhood is less relevant today, second priority.

Gas pipes, EUROMED project - When you talk with experts, geologists, they would explain that geography in the area between Israel and Cyprus is very challenging, costly, even if not impossible. 10 years: not financially stable, today with the energy prices going up and up in the world, more hesitant. It is a very nice idea and project, but complicated. It also complicates the relations with Turkey, not all European players agree; it is a violation of the power of Turkey in the area. There were lots of incidents before 7/10, it had to do with that, too. The Ministry of Energy, behind closed doors, would tell you they promote it, but not so sure that anything practical will ever happen, because it is technically challenging due to geography.

Other AREAS of development,

assuming that the war is over; solution with Gaza and Lebanon:

- **Innovation cooperation** is very high on the agenda, also very relevant to HEI and research cooperation. European Hub of Innovation - branch in Israel. Biggest hub outside of the EU in Israel, in Tel Aviv. Many embassies open innovation coordinator positions.
- **Military and defence systems.** With all the European criticism about the military industry in Israel, still NATO member states are interested in defence mechanisms. E.g., laser, relevant with the conflict with Russia. This is the hub for the future defence systems in Europe. Part of the feeling of neglect towards the EU is that they see it - this is your future defence systems. If the next President will be Trump, most European allies will turn their cooperation towards the EU - not relating to NATO; developments at the EU level, not just NATO.

If a peaceful solution is reached, if we come back to the Abraham accords, the EU will want to be part of it. Normalisation with Israel - the EU would be happy to be part of such developments. For the stability, such agreements would serve the EU mentioned above.

Internal struggles

It also depends on the international situation of Israel, and on the character of the State. Elections are held every four years, but governments usually fall before. It is not a miracle, but unexpected (negative). Biggest challenge for the government of Israel: ultra orthodox parties.

f. MOURATO PINTO, João, interview by author, October 11, 2024.

João is a PhD candidate studying the global actorness of the European Union, especially towards Brazil and South America. He holds an MSc in International Relations from both the University of Coimbra (Portugal) and Sciences Po Bordeaux (France). After working in the European Research Council (European Commission), he was also President of Erasmus Student Network AISBL, a student organisation through which he advocated for academic exchanges and R&D as tools for fostering intercultural communication and development.

Main insights and highlights:

- History and development of Science Diplomacy (SD) in the EU and beyond, the 4 areas that define SD and relevance for the EU Strategy
- The role of EU institutions in the development of science diplomacy strategies
- Neighbouring regions and the strategy of the EU's SD to integrate them within the European scheme, esp., Africa, but also South Asia and Latin America, mostly
- Connecting Eastern Europe via Erasmus after the "Iron curtain"
- Science diplomacy, research and international mobility (Erasmus+) as a tool for understanding and intercultural dialogue and cooperation

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(Context) Science diplomacy

History of science diplomacy. In the early 2000s it was given a name, but the activity is really old. E.g., time zones were made (geographies, etc; negotiation between science and diplomacy and politics in the end to advance common purposes in humanity), phone numbers code. The Renaissance connection between politics and science is troubled.

Context of the military - scientists for new weapons. Politicians needed scientists to be with them to be more powerful.

Concepts started to be working on from the early 2000s, mainly in the US. There was a heavy connection between science and politics, more than diplomacy. They had experience working with Einstein on nuclear weapons, history during the Cold War... In the 90s the world became more complex. There was this realisation that you need to collaborate with scientists on a permanent basis, especially on the international sphere. It was the first time that a topic was truly international: climate change. A long-term process that needs a lot of research. The IPCC won Nobel Prize in 2007.

Where does the EU come into play?

The EU was a late-comer to this discussion, but just because we compare ourselves with the US. They started working on this being advanced; even if China was taking the first steps. It is not when we start, but how slow we were in the process.

Initially, there is a previous document from 2008 where the Commission put the principles of Science Diplomacy (SD), ideas and concepts, outside, even if not talking about SD specifically (“European cooperation science”).

In 2010 some famous documents were released by the American Association for the Advancement of Science together with the Royal Society of the UK - “New frontiers”*. They made the connection between SD as a field and the concept of soft power. Until then, the US SD was used to foster cooperation with just a few countries, to project their own science to the world (cooperative but comparative approach). It was not really used as a tool for International Relations (IR), more for science, science-focused, to internationalise it. When these documents were put out, things really shifted. Couple of years later the Commission put out a document that for the first time mentions science diplomacy as part of the EU strategy for Research & Innovation, not still considering it as something to use abroad to connect to the world, to advance EU science.

The first EU documents on science diplomacy came out in 2012: “Strategic approach enhancing Research and Innovation”.

A new document will be released in December 2024-January 2025. “EU Science Diplomacy Strategy - Report”. It will contain recommendations from the present to the future; and be preceded by a broad context and history.

*ARE(s) ESTABLISHED BY “NEW FRONTIERS”:

- Research centre in Switzerland. CERN. **“Diplomacy for science”**, how can diplomacy make science advance.
- **“Science for diplomacy”**. How can science help countries to advance good diplomatic relations? Best example: SESAME (... ME part: Middle East), established in Jordan. It gets funding from a lot of ME countries, Iran also, and including Israel. Israel is working alongside Jordan, Lebanon, etc, to advance science in that specific topic.
- **“Science in diplomacy”**. Best example: IPCC. Depends on the UN, EU-Diplomats together with international scientists. Decision based on science. What comes out of COP is political, but the reports put forward by the IPCC are science. Science can inform diplomacy.

During the Juncker Commission, important advancements on SD took place. It is important to mention his speech in Washington in 2015, *EC wayback Archive database* - he says that the EU should be more interested in SD, for IR. Not just about science and cooperation, framing SD within IR. It led to a document that was approved in 2015-16 “Open innovation, open science, open to the world” - perspective on opening EU science to the world. Context: Trump applying for Presidency and succeeding, same for Brexit; US retiring in some ways from its former role; rise in China, becoming a world class centre of R&I, not factory; India first steps with Modi getting into power. EU NEEDED to provide better answers to countries, e.g., Africa, South East Asia, Latin America, Middle East; that wanted to cooperate and benefit from the advancement of science but did not have the resources.

It came from Horizon 2020 Framework programme for Science and Technology - FP 8 (for the first time a name). It has a proper chapter on cooperation with third countries, a lot with equally advanced countries: reciprocity. Switzerland, Norway, Israel-; mechanisms to collaborate with less advanced countries, esp. If they were EU neighbours and selected countries around the world.

Current programme: FP9 Horizon Europe (2021-) - fully fledged area with people in Brussels working just in this, to work on EU in the connection with SD (specifically mention). What changed, how did we come here?

Horizon 2020 funded 3 research projects that studied EU SD. EL-CSID, S4D4C, INNSCID (INSIDES; most recent. Name to be checked). Results were so important that the coordinators decided to organise themselves and once the project ended and create the **EU Science Diplomacy Alliance**.

EL-CSID - 4th pillar: **“Diplomacy in science”** (*this one is less “official”, not as embraced*). Science has to learn the tools that diplomacy has, communication, and use it for them as well. It comes out in 2019-20, misinformation was growing so fast, science losing credibility; when it was benefiting from social support, but science has now to develop.

From 2020 - Rapid advancement.

The role of the European Commission

2019 - Von der Leyen Commission calling itself the “geopolitical commission”, concept of team Europe. Don't create new structures to collaborate in the EU and the outside world. Working together on common objectives, we need time to meet and talk about topics. Like this, we advance together.

2020 - The EU appoints by the first time an External Service expert working on SD, advisor to provide advice on how science diplomacy can be used to connect with several countries and regions of the world

2021 -

The EU sets an informal network of informal science advisor/counsellors, all the science people working in the different countries. Informal, space to talk to each other.

The Madrid Declaration was put out, written by experts in SD together with some diplomats. Asks the EU to be more serious in SD.

2023 - first SD conference in Madrid. Brought scholars and politicians together.

The role of the EU Council

Ministers of all the fields meet periodically, Presided by a country every 6 months, every have a Secretariat. Within the Science one, there is one group that works on the European Research Area (collaborative forum, to allow and enhance cooperation).

ERA has a specific team - SFIC (Strategic Forum for International FNT Cooperation), which produced a report on 2022-23, *published by Pintos*, to push the Commission from the Council side to work a lot more on SD: team to work on SD specifically.

At the end of 2023, the Council mandated the Commission to create a SD strategy. Council conclusions, recommendations; mandate to the Commission to create a task force that should discuss how the strategy should be built.

In December, an open call was put out targeting anyone interested in joining it. It received a lot of attention. 570 people applied, 100 were selected. They were divided into 5 teams, discussing different topics. The report that will be released in December will contain its results; Joao was part of that team. Academics, diplomats, scientists. E.g., 2 Portugal. More than 30 recommendations were written, and from those the EU is gonna create a Strategy.

Earlier this year, Feb-March 2024, Council put out a document on priorities. Esp., that SD respects the values of the EU.

OTHER IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS:

“Global approach for R&I”. European Commission

Launched in 2021, we were already turning the pave of COVID, because of vaccines produced in Europe from research highly funded by the EU. Israel also participated in the meetings due to Horizon2020 - Israeli scientists? At the political level they were present, applying for funds. This is the main EU strategy for this field.

“Council Conclusions on Values and Principles”. EU Council

> WHEN YOU PUT THEM TOGETHER: Course of action. Priorities, starting from the regions: (1) Neighbourhood - MENA region?, (2) Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa. Comparing the funding that the region gets in Horizon 2020 and 2021. WHY is Africa the priority? 3 main reasons:

1) Facility, proximity - closest region to Europe, closer than the Americas or Asia, esp. If you take the neighbourhood part of Asia out. A lot of countries are in Africa: part of the Azores, Madeira, Canary Islands, Melilla and Ceuta; Malta.

2) It has suffered from European proximity in the past, from the colonial period - approach from the lenses of development cooperation, strategy since the 60s, since the beginning of the European Communities. Before: donor-recipient - elites eating up all money; investment in certain sectors - monopolisation; food water production buildings etc - corruption; hard to provide help to Africa because systems corrupted, it did not work after decades of investments. New approaches: training the military in Africa, e.g., Mozambique, providing them with weapons to fight Islamic terrorism.

3) Supporting through collaboration in science: providing a fast way to collaborate in a scientific way. Not measuring the impact. *EU with Israel in the 80s, EURATOM*. Strategies with how to engage with Africa, on equal terms, sustainable development. If you help, stop migration; the EU can absorb more migrants, but some countries and cities cannot (southern France, Italy and Spain; Greek areas); finding solutions by long-term investments in science, facilities, and cooperation with universities.

DESPITE ALL THIS: EU losing its grasp in Africa. Two actors coming strong: Russia - Russian intervention through the Sahel through military support, creating instability in the region, internal pushback against the EU (narrative: “new colonial”; even if some truth, propaganda). The EU is trying to fight the Russian influence in Africa. Not for the good, paramilitary forces in unstable and corrupted areas - security problem. Second pillar: security.

Third pillar: China. Investments made on the principle of “we invest in your country but you have to pay us back”, a loan-based system. It is, in reality, damaging, this is how France colonised Tunisia. Through those investments, it created dependency - this is what is happening now with China. Form of colonialism: you command the budget, economy of a country; but commanding the politics. China does not care about the values, it comes with the package of creating dependency. “Debt-dependency model”.

EU proposal on Science Diplomacy

Different modality: “Value-based model”. To invest, those countries have to accept, embracing some of the so-called EU values. Not obliged, but so much money, so they compel. Treaty of Lisbon: human rights, rule of law, democracy, respect for multilateralism (UN)... Priorities set from those values: digital transition, green sustainability, etc.

- **EXAMPLE:** Angola - economy so dependent on oil. Multi-annual indicative programme (MIP) - signed with Angola. 7 years - EU gives money for the first 4 years, at the end: meeting to evaluate the progress of those investments and also the advancement the EU values. Only after they decide the last 3 years do they also invest. Conditionality.

> **Areas of interest**

ANOTHER PRIORITY: South-East Asia. Different animal bc closer to China, Chinese population in Indonesia for example and they are culturally Chinese (food, religion...). Interesting investments in cooperation with ASIAN, esp. HEI cooperation. The EU is trying to create an Erasmus+ programme just for Asia and Africa.

- **Intra-African Mobility Scheme.** Within Africa only, Erasmus from Angola to Zambia using EU funds. Rationale: fostering this kind of links, strengthen Africa and down the path will decrease migration to the EU.
- **South-East Asia.** Investments in HEI*, a programme called ERISE, Student support in S-E Asia, meeting in Singapore - trained by educators to single associations foundation that could join ESN in the future.
- **Latin America.** Unpair with S-E in human developments, much bigger, larger, that the approach has to be different. It is also very unequal, world-class universities and poorest countries in the world. Very much university-based, applying for European funding: Horizon for example. RECENT, but it was very fast; now there is funding for this, common projects... Region is more developed, can catch-up more, despite inequality, and can cooperate with the EU.* Cooperation with CELAC.

While in Africa you use African Union, programmes for each country: in S-E you use Education bc considered as universal good so no countries interests, in Europe all accept Chinese investments;

* Project Joao evaluated: creation of communities of researchers in different cities and countries; but connections were bad. E.g., Colombia (also because of the geographical location). EU investments on a project to create a digital space, shared pavement for research...

Neighbourhood is treated differently. The EU uses Erasmus from the 90s to connect with the enlargement of 20 years later, to break the Iron curtain in Berlin, specially in the post-Soviet block. The EU invested in Erasmus to connect with East European countries (at the time, now CEP), ESN had a discussion in the 90s if it should expand in the 90s. Scepticism present since the beginning. Interesting when you think of the power of ESN Poland, ESN Czech Republic...

ESN has a big problem with **intercultural communication**, good just in the easier closest partners. Suspicious, fear. Dont ignore people's feelings, work on those feelings. De-centralised training events, for example. E.g., Kostis put people from Israel in all Regional platforms - capacity building projects with partner universities in Israel (most of them sent 2 Israeli students). Goal: to foster intercultural communication. Not important measures, Board can invite whoever - Eurodinner, for example.

> SCIENCE DIPLOMACY is the way to advance this, to create spaces for dialogue and intercultural exchange. Counterproductive: telling people they are wrong, fighting: BETTER to provide tools for overcoming intercultural communication problems. This is the motto of ESN, too> Students helping Students (it does not have nationality, colour scheme, sexual orientations...).

HEI nowadays is a soft power tool, and Erasmus+ has been used as a soft power tool.

g. Porat, Asaf, interview by author, October 23, 2024.

Mr. Porat has been working, since April 2023, in the Israeli Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure, within its International Department. Additionally, he is Senior Project Coordinator at the Simone Veil Research Centre for Contemporary European Studies at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. His educational background includes a Master's and Bachelor's degree in Political Science and European Studies from Ben-Gurion University, with a focus on Diplomacy and History of the EU and Energy Cooperation, of which he intends to pursue a PhD.

- *Working for all the multilateral cooperation of Israel, a mega size project. E.g., Interconnector cable - all projects with international components.*
- *Mainly working on the relation with the EU, Netherlands, Greece and Germany.*
- *Thesis on diplomacy and energy - History of the EU and energy cooperation, esp. when it comes to gas prices.*

Main insights and highlights:

- Israel strategic position and long-term investment in regional energy cooperation
- Complexities and opportunities of EU energy cooperation and geopolitical and normative challenges

R&D, Energy cooperation

In the last 15 to 20 years, there have been significant and fast developments, especially in the fields of research and development, at both the governmental and academic levels. Our best partner has been the EU, particularly Germany and other European nations that signed an energy cooperation agreement at COP*. They serve as a model for expanding collaborations with nations such as France and the Netherlands.

*Signed for 2025, but in November. The agreement addresses five to six major topics (chapters), including hydrogen development and regional connectivity.

In order to encourage Israeli innovation, Israel wants to collaborate in order to apply its knowledge and experience in energy facilities. Working with the EU is challenging, though, because it has complex regulations that Israel must follow in order to use it within its borders. In order to encourage import and export, the state advocates for significant reforms in this area; however, this typically entails additional bureaucracy during the process. The idea is to thus encourage companies to invest in Israel, since regulations are similar to Europe.

Importance of “regional connectivity”

INEC vision. Israel is energy-rich in goods, resources and knowledge, which makes them a stable and trustworthy partner. The only possible bridge between the East and the West, between the Arabian Peninsula and the EU. Stable, you can trust it. Other solutions include

using Egypt, but this is a problematic partner, due to the lack of gas, recently they bought diesel to sell it to Europe. Recently, Israel is investing in long-term projects with Cyprus and Greece. Cyprus is probably going to produce natural gas. Israel, on the other hand, is not producing enough hydrogen to Europe, nor selling as much gas, but it is indeed the ultimate bridge. It is about understanding who is the ultimate partner. Working with the EU remains difficult, as Israel doesn't have direct contact with the Ministries of Energy, etc. Connection between ministers is needed, as well as discussion on the relation on energy between the EU and Israel.

The **energy-cooperation project** is complicated at the moment, not financially sustainable. This is a “phoenix” project: every two years, it dies. Moreover, in some years, Europe won't need any gas, and gas pipes are to be converted into hydrogen pipes. We see this project as an “interconnector”, not a functional project that will bring gas to Europe. Israel has gas, but not enough for what the EU needs. Just to export to Egypt and Jordan, and Israel wants to keep some gas for the future, since it depends on gas. It is a question of energy security, it is important for Israel to stay independent. Export but together with Emirates, Qatar, Saudi Arabia. Showing to the world that you can invest in energy projects in Israel, it is the right place to invest long-term. (*Egypt in 2011, unstable*).

Energy relations with the EU

Israel maintains good relations with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Brussels, works frequently with and through them. Academics are going to Brussels next month, people still want to meet them. “We still have friends in Europe”.

The most important relationship, though, is that between the Energy Commissioners in Israel and the Directorate-General for Energy (DG ENER) of the EU Commission. Still to be developed even more. Politically, it is challenging. Every time something happens with Palestine, everything stops. This affects specially the field of Energy, as energy projects are often long-term, and to complete them and see results it takes at least 10 years.

However, Israel pictures itself as an “energetic bridge”, working from the West, but solving at the same time problems in the East, esp., with Egypt.

Public perception of the EU in Israel

There is a significant difference between how you work with the European Union, and how institutions perceive Israel and the relation, and how the public in Israel perceives the EU, with the institutions, and the field. Public opinion often views the EU as the “enemy”, around 54% of the Israelis, even those holding an European passport.

This is partly due to a lack of understanding. Israel is a democratic country, we don't publish any photo (on the conflict), unlike Palestine. Even if what happens in Gaza is terrible, but we don't see it, it's difficult to understand why people condemn this.

People see us as underdog, but we are the most powerful country in the area. It is difficult to do good public diplomacy. Also, people are afraid to fly to Europe because of antisemitism, esp., Belgium, Netherlands. Some of the leaders there don't want to meet us, rescheduling ceremonies to the COP - Greece. Antisemitism is reaching the governmental level.

There is also a lack of knowledge (from Europeans). People are not visiting Israel and thus not understanding what is going on in the country. The problem of Gaza is mainly Hamas. In the West Bank, though, the situation is different. There are, indeed, violent Jewish radicals. This hurts meetings with EU officials and the Commission.

European cooperation is a long-term strategy, and thus very limited in effectiveness. Nevertheless, Israel needs the EU by their side. Israel needs the EU as a partner. It needs to learn on how to work with it at the regional level, as well as in research and development, and from the EU about regulation, esp., in energy and infrastructure.