

# Israel and the State of the (European) Union

## Funding Israel's Detractors

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In the 60 years of Israeli independence, relations with Europe have gone through phases of cooperation as well as conflict. Some of the recent friction results from hidden European Union funding for anti-Israel "civil society organizations." While supposedly promoting peace and coexistence, these groups often preach division and confrontation. The secrecy of the NGO funding process also stands in sharp contrast to the EU's pious claims of transparency and accountability. There is no central database on NGO funding and many EU officials contacted proved unwilling or unable to provide any information.

Among the recipients are a number of Israeli political groups that focus on allegations of human rights abuses, such as Machsom Watch and B'tselem. They diligently take down every Palestinian complaint at face value and write inflammable reports castigating Israel as the aggressor. They do so by leaving out essential context, such as the constant Palestinian terror attacks that prompt the criticized Israeli policies, including road blocks and incursions, in the first place.

Even more radical are Israeli Arab NGOs, such as Adalah, Mossawa, the Arab Association for Human Rights (HRA), and HaMoked. Their titles and mission statements use the language of human rights and peace and they receive EU money in this guise. But actually they do the opposite. These groups poison any reasonable dialogue by demonizing Israel, for example by drawing parallels to the apartheid regime. Their advocacy for a single state, where Jews would quickly become a minority, is just another way of calling for the end of Israel as a Jewish state.

The EU was also one of the main funders of the infamous NGO Forum of the 2001 Durban conference. Designed to fight racism, it turned into one of the most despicable displays of modern anti-Semitism. The Forum accused Israel of ethnic cleansing and genocide, and called for "a policy of complete and total isolation of Israel as an apartheid state" through boycotts, divestment and sanctions. After leading the Forum, the Palestinian NGO Network became the primary sponsor of the academic boycott and divestment campaigns against Israel. Under the guise of promoting peace and understanding, the EU thus indirectly funds campaigns to ban Israeli academics from international conferences.

In justifying support for groups which oppose the EU's own policies, officials claim that their funding is narrowly confined to specific projects that supposedly don't contradict EU positions. But given the fact that money is fungible, this is a rather weak excuse. Apart from funding Israel's critics, the EU is also surreptitiously trying to manipulate the Israeli democratic process.

The EU's Partnership for Peace program, with an annual budget of over €8 million, lists a number of mysterious recipients, such as the H.L. Education for Peace Ltd. This organization has no Internet site, and a check at the Israeli government registry for non-profit organizations failed to turn up any trace of this group. Our research found that H.L. Education for Peace was a cover for the Geneva Initiative -- a controversial attempt to bypass the Israeli government and negotiate a private peace agreement between former (left-wing) Israeli officials and Fatah members.

Furtively funded by the EU, this NGO bombards Israelis with exhortations to attend rallies and takes out expensive newspaper ads extolling the virtues of the initiative, while attacking the government's policies. It is hard to imagine the EU interfering in such blatant ways in the political process of any other democratic country.

Among the numerous and highly confusing EU funding frameworks for NGOs claiming to promote democracy and peace, the European Commission's Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid (DG ECHO) is both the wealthiest and the most secretive. ECHO's 2006 budget was approximately €700 million, of which over €80 million was allocated to the West Bank and Gaza, including an unspecified amount for NGOs. As elsewhere, there is no public record of which NGOs receive the funds, the projects for which they are allocated, or the evaluation process, if any.

However, many recipients advertise the fact that they receive EU support, thereby increasing legitimacy and visibility. In this way, we uncovered details of funding for groups such as Medical Aid for Palestinians, which received over €1 million in 2004-2006. Its full-page ad published in The Times in January proclaims: "After two years of sanctions, the cutting-off of fuel supplies, repeated military incursions and the closure of its borders, Gaza is in the grip of a humanitarian crisis." There is no mention of terror attacks, corruption, or Hamas.

With the Durban review conference and another round of vitriolic NGO-led attacks against Israel scheduled for 2009, Jerusalem is watching for a change in European policy. Canada, for example, already said that it won't participate in Durban II because it's likely to become another anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli hate fest. Ottawa has also barred government funding for NGOs participating in the conference.

Both Canada and the U.S. practice full transparency by providing details for their NGO funding. They have strict guidelines designed to prevent grant recipients from using the money for hostile campaigning instead for humanitarian projects. The EU could do worse than follow this example.

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