

## OVERVIEW OF THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE STATE OF ISRAEL

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**Abstract:** *The objective of this paper work is to try to formulate an analysis identifying whether there is an influence on the part of the European Union in the Middle East, specifically in Israel. If we take into account the region in which the state of Israel is located, we will realize that this is a state affected by various conflicts. The State of Israel is an associate member of the European Union and due to the economically strong relations that the European Union has had with Israel over time, we can ask ourselves in which way can the European Community influence this country in other areas as well.*

**Key words:** *European Union, Middle East, Israel, foreign policy.*

### 1. Introduction

Due to the fact that there is no common foreign policy adopted by all European Union member states, and they have the right and sovereignty to maintain their own approach in certain areas towards another international player, there will always be voices against certain policies in relation to the state of Israel.

Over time, we have noticed that there is a conflict between the European Union's approaches as a whole and the approaches of each individual member state. More often these different approaches occur due to the national interest of each state.

The state of Israel is an associate member of the European Union. The first legal ties between Israel and the European Union resulted in 1995, with the receiving of the associated membership. Although Israel is not geographically in Europe, this state is a member of several transnational European pacts and committees, and it also takes part in the majority of the events supporting Europe and the European Union. Over time several Israeli ministers said that they would like to see Israel in the European Union. The other side and the European representatives showed their support, maintained close collaboration between the two parties.

The state of Israel is an example to follow, a sovereign state with a relatively short history and settlements developing from the nineteenth century. This project, which at

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first seemed unachievable, became a strong country from a military, economic and social point of view. It has been able to overcome many obstacles over the years, with the major goal being to integrate Jews from all over the world. So we can say that a parliamentary democracy has been formed characterised by a phenomenon of reconstruction and economic transformations. With regard to international policy, over time there have been conflicts with Arab States, tensions with Lebanon and Syria, but also with the Palestinian territories. (Lust, 2011, p. 460)

When we talk about the European Union, we are thinking of an important player on the stage of international relations, particularly in some strategic areas, such as the economic field. The economic field is by far the strongest of the European Union since its formation, the main stake being to create a global economic superpower, disputing its first place with the United States of America. However, the European Union is far from being called the classical actor in international relations.

We can think about whether the European Union should be perceived as an 'actor' in the true sense of the word because, as we all know, in international relations the main actors are states. Therefore, the European Community does not fall exactly in the classical definition of international relations offered by Hans Morgenthau. This Union of States has succeeded in gaining legitimacy in international relations, with all these states working in the Union to achieve common goals.

The European Union's foreign policy has an important axis in the Middle East, with Israel being the main partner in the region.

Moreover, Israel presents a modern, stable and fully functional market economy, indicating the largest gross domestic product and the highest standard of living in this region. Exports are based on specific areas such as: diamond trade, high-tech technology and pharmaceuticals. Due to these exports, the state economy of Israel increased by about 5% percent between 2004 and 2013, and this is due to its good relations with the European Union, the European Community being the main economic partner (Moody's Analytics, 2021).

Geographical proximity, dependence on oil in the Middle East, but also the preservation of security have historically made it more important for European States to give greater importance to the Arab-Israeli conflict. The conflict was not only an interest for the pieces involved, the peace process represented more interest to external actors who tried to come up with a solution for conflict resolution (Musu, 2010, p. 171).

## **2. Discussion**

The notion of super power is still associated with military power. The European Union has no military capabilities and not even a defence policy. So it is still impossible to be labeled as a super power like the United States or the former Soviet Union. Secondly, the notion of super power is associated with states, the perception being that only states can have a real influence in international relations because only states have military capabilities (McCormick, 2015, p. 392).

The question that persists is whether the European Community can influence the peace process between Israel and Palestine. In this case, there are different visions,

priorities and strategies between the European and Israeli sides. Lately, there has been a change in Israeli thinking, which has taken into account a possible international power to watch over agreements between Israel and Palestine, to see if they are respected. Israel sees in Europe a potential global actor that can have a greater influence in the region, can become a power that has a duty to oversee the proper conduct of things in the Middle East. The European Community has the capacity to become a global player influencing the peace process in the Middle East. Europe must also play an important role in resolving other problems in the region, such as: Iranian danger, terrorism and organized crime (Pardo & Peters, 2010, p. 72).

Most of the relations between Europe and Israel are based on economic exchanges. The European Union is the main source for Israeli imports and the second most important source for Israeli exports. The links between the two parties are carried out on several areas of interest. Science, technology, tourism, industry, agriculture and academic exchanges are the main areas of mutual interest. All these things have led over time to the idea that Europe is a natural partner of Israel. This adds to the fact that Israel is the third non-member State (after Norway and Switzerland) participating in projects and programmes financed by the EU (Jorgensen, Aarstad, Drieskens, Laatikainen & Tonra, 2015, p. 661).

The European Union and Israel are signatories to several treaties that have led to the development of relations over time. The European Union has developed relations with Israel comparable to most states on the Asian continent. We can see another approach in which the formation of economic links is being tried as closely as possible. It is even an ambition of the European Union to develop very strong economic relations, but moreover it is also a desire to contribute to the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, although there are various views within the EU with regard to this problematic issue.

With regard to the conflict between the Arab side and the Israeli side, the European Union has always had a policy aimed at peace and cooperation. The European Community has embraced the idea of a *two-state solution* in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with the Union officials having more public statements in which they said so (Bolborici, 2016, p. 182, 284).

However, these allegations were not supported by concrete strategies, most of the time Europeans relied on the fact that only the United States would have the power to bring the parties to a common denominator (Fawcett, 2013, p. 356).

The economic relations between the two actors seem to be quite tight, in any case, appear to be closer than EU relations with the other States forming part of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Moreover, I believe that a major role has also been played by the fact that Israel is politically isolated in its region, unable to have strong economic relations with its neighbours. So we can say that this has played an important role in developing relations with the European Union. Israel is treated in a more special way, being left to adhere to various common development programmes. Another fact is that the relations of the member states are different with Israel from one state to another, with different approaches, the approach being often closely linked to the ruling political party.

Although Israel is geographically in the Middle East, it is economically linked to a greater extent to the European continent. More than half of the imports made by Israel have their origin in the European Community (Common Market) and almost half of the percentage of exports are undertaken with the European Union. Moreover, we must remember that in 1977 Israel signed an agreement, a treaty with the European Community through which it obtained a special status whereby it no longer had to pay all the ordinary taxes for non-European countries.

The external environment of a state is a very large and complicated field because it is dependent on many variables and it is extremely important to understand it. Israel, since its declaration of independence, has faced the issue of legitimacy at international level and experienced a low level of acceptance of its policies within the world community. This has expanded from the political environment into the cultural environment, with the political conflict affecting Israel's relations with the rest of the world. Due to this situation, Israel must always be prepared to defend itself in front of the United Nations, but also in front of other states that challenge it, or which condemn it for various reasons. There are a variety of factors that can influence these decisions (Mahler, 2011, p. 234).

This relationship developed with the European Union is a continuation of the Hertz line, which emphasized the relations with the great powers. Israel has been an associated state in the European Union's research and innovation programmes since 1996. The last programme was carried out from 2007 to 2013, a drill in which public and private institutions contributed their scientific expertise to over 1500 projects. Horizon 2020 promises about 80 billion euros for seven years, which is the European Union's biggest programme. The Horizon 2020 programme is one of the most important programmes ever developed by the European Union. This programme focuses on innovation and research. Israel is part of this programme, the cooperation with the European Union, favouring the formation of a mechanism that can lead to mutual understanding, but also to the development of regional partnerships (European Commission, 2021).

Due to tensions and wars, Israel's foreign policy has suffered various fluctuations and changes over time. The only certainties in Israel's foreign policy are offered by the peace treaties signed by Israel with Egypt as early as 1979 and Jordan in 1994. Apart from these, theoretically speaking, all other boundaries of the state are still in a state of war (Mahler, 2011, p. 235).

In the near future, it is possible for Israel to participate in the European Union's policies and programmes in a more active way. A more developed type of political cooperation, along with similar economic legislation, could provide an incentive for investment. The technical support provided by the European Union, but also the sums of money coming from the European Neighbourhood Policy, can lead to the development of the Israeli society (Eufocus, 2007, p. 5).

Combating terrorism has been and will continue to be an existential problem for Israel. In cooperation with its other partners, the European Union has announced, on numerous occasions, that global terrorism is a problem that is on the European agenda

and that the fight against terrorism must be continued. The main objective was to stop terrorist access to financial resources and to curb massive recruiting in society. Cooperation between the EU and Israel has increased significantly in combating terrorism through various initiatives. In February 2005 the Council for Justice and Home Affairs, promoted by the EU, endorsed a co-operation agreement between Europol and Israel. Europol is an organisation that fights crime at European level and helps to co-operate between the competent authorities for the prevention and combating of terrorism, drug trafficking and other forms of organised crime. Cooperation between Israel and the EU has been emphasized in the fight against money laundering, with Israel being an active observer within the MONEYVAL (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 20).

Israel is among the first countries to engage in dialogue with the European Economic Community before the legal ratification of the Treaty of Rome in 1957. Although there has been interest in Israel since the 60s due to historical factors, relations between the European Community and Israel have not developed very much ( because of the war of 1967, the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Holocaust.) The European Community's is interested to develop a stable relationship with Israel, precisely due to uncertainty in the Middle East. All these things have led to Israel remaining an isolated country among the Arab neighbours (Pardo & Peters, 2010, p. 1).

Over the years Israel and Europe have developed joint links. Many of them were developed because of common interests in the scientific and economic field. Today the situation is different, the European Union being one of Israel's most important partners in various fields of activity. From a political point of view, Israel wants to gather ties with the European Community and be part of the European project (Pardo & Peters, 2010, p. 2).

At the same time, Israel and the European Union have a common past, over the last 20 years, involving regional multilateral projects aimed at the development of relations with the Arab world. The impossibility of the European Union to resolve the crisis in the Middle East with the help of these agreements has led to a decrease in confidence in the European institutions lately. However, relations between the European Union and Israel must develop and continue without being influenced by other conflicts in the region (Pardo & Peters, 2010, p. 3).

The creation of the state of Israel was favored by the most unfortunate moment in world history, the Holocaust. Many of the Jews have European ancestors, especially from Eastern Europe (Romania, Poland and Bulgaria). Because of the difficult relationships they had with neighbours in the Middle East, Israel had to veer to the European continent. The relationship with Israel will always be complicated due to the Arab minority and the geographical position. However, Israel and the European Union have signed agreements favouring economic exchanges and political dialogues (McCormick, 2015, p. 42).

### **3. Conclusion**

Even if the UK and the European Union finally agreed to a deal that will define their future relationship, Europe is in a continuous process of enlargement, its policies trying

to influence as many states as possible. Nonetheless, according to Sorea, the Brexit crisis emerged apparently under the pressure of a much higher diversity than reckoned and that the members of the union could not master any longer (Sorea, 2017, p. 111).

However, most times the Middle East states are skeptical when it comes to peaceful policies promoted by the European Community. Europe will most likely continue to play a secondary role in the peace process, which is due to its limitation as regards the external approach, with Europe having to form its foreign policy in line with all of the 27 Member States (Del Sarto, 2015, p. 72).

There is no single answer to these questions, but in the European context, the countries' approaches to the Middle East are different. The States of the European Union have failed each time to reach a common denominator in relation to the Middle East. Therefore, these distinct views were possible due to the own objectives of each State. France's desire to develop a distinctive European policy (Union for the Mediterranean of 2008), Germany's desire to develop good relations with both Israel, as well as with the Arab States, eventually led to a stagnation in the European integration process. In most cases, the approaches took into account the specific interests of each State, with national priorities being put before the common interest of the European Union (Musu, 2010, p. 172).

The European Union's policies in the peace process have not been very successful because the European Community has always been seen as a secondary actor. The European Union cannot be compared with the United States because it has no military capabilities and cannot promise to preserve security in the region. Finally, the United States remains the only great credible power and the sole guarantor of international peace and security. The European Union is limited both internally due to the different viewpoints of the Member States and externally due to the US hegemony. The Middle East still presents interest to both the US and the European Union due to several economic and strategic factors (Musu, 2010, p. 176).

However, the Middle East peace process has provided the perfect basis for the European Union to become a more influential global player and have a say on the international stage. The US, on the other hand, tried to limit the EU's influence in the region, desiring to maintain its leading role. The European Union has tried to help achieve peace through financial support, with European funds being used to develop the occupied territories, with the European Community being perceived as a donor. Relations between the European Union and Israel are still very good economically, with Europe being the main economic partner of Israel. It is therefore expected that this privileged economic relationship leads to a more advanced political dialogue in the near future (Musu, 2010, p. 176).

Responding to the question of whether the European Union can play an important role in the evolution of the Middle East peace process, the most virulent critics believe that too strong national interests of some Member States have revealed an incoherent political Union, crushed by frequent internal blockages of unitary political action. However, it does not legitimize it in this intractable conflict (Bolborici, 2020, p. 6).

Certainly, the European Union is acting to gain a substantial role in the peace process in the Middle East but unfortunately, the lack of cohesion is more prominent; so, even in this situation a strong consensus among European leaders on the idea that the EU should develop a more constructive role in the Middle East is remarkable.

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