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T-F Post

# Why EU should be a player, not just a payer

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The European Union will shortly host a regional conference to debate anti-Semitism in Europe. This follows a well organised campaign against the EU, and accusations against the Commission of aiding or not doing enough to curtail the rise of anti-Semitic feeling in Europe.

Having decided to hold the debate later this month, the EU appeared to be caving in to pro-Israel Jewish organisations and pressure groups, including the powerful World Jewish Congress, WJC. This should not be, and is not precisely the case.

Europe should not fear such a debate, as the discussion would clearly conclude that criticism of Israel's policy, or more correctly that of its government's, does not indicate that the EU is becoming anti-Semitic.

The EU can be blamed for many things, but the accusation that its Commission is guilty of anti-Semitism is both unprecedented and historically inaccurate, at least in the second half of last century.

After a furious exchange of barrage and angry criticism between the two parties, EU Commissioner Romano Prodi and his attackers from the JWC agreed to go ahead with the conference to discuss the issue. Many European ministers, including Germany's foreign minister, Joschka Fischer, are expected to take part in the conference.

The dispute was triggered by the "Eurobarometer" poll that showed that 59 per cent of Europeans questioned saw Israel as the greatest threat to world peace. The WJC also accused the EU of suppressing a report on anti-Semitism by the EU's racism monitoring centre in Vienna. Though the Vienna's report is not related to the poll result, the WJC bluntly claimed both were "politically motivated".

But it has to be said that it is evident that WJC and other pro-Israel organisations have been engaged in a deliberately misleading campaign, in order to help Israel's government out of its messy actions in the Palestine occupied territories.

The whole campaign relating to anti-Semitism is emanating from a basic fact: Everybody who criticises Israel's government actions against the Palestinians is automatically accused

as an anti-Semite. But very few people in Europe are buying this. The Europeans, with varying degrees of course, are intelligent enough to distinguish between criticising Israel's actions and anti-Semitism.

Somebody who criticises Israel's actions and harsh treatment of the Palestinians under occupation cannot be accused of anti-Semitism. This is different from criticising Israel because of its Jewish identity.

The vast majority of Europeans criticise Israel because of its occupation and expansion policy, not because of its Jewish-ness.

Israel's protagonists and most loyal supporters are doing, wittingly or otherwise, a great deal of damage to the fight against anti-Semitism by their stand. Presenting all critics of Israel as anti-Semitic is not only wrong but counterproductive.

There is a huge number of people, including Jews and Jewish supporters, who are morally driven in their criticism of Israel's behaviour in the Occupied Territories. It is simply stupid to accuse them of being anti-Semitic.

EU critics also resort to another method of misleading when they wrongly and deliberately confuse anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism. One can naturally be anti-Zionist without being anti-Semite. Zionism is a political creed and must be looked at as any other.

Israel is getting solid support and continuous backing from a powerful pressure group known for its anti-Semitic views. The ruling extreme right Zionist in Israel welcome the massive support from American fundamentalist Christian evangelicals.

The evangelists theology prophesies that on the eve of the second coming of Jesus Christ, all Jews must convert to Christianity or face the alternative: Extermination. In a recent poll in the United States the majority of American Jews have said this sect was anti-Semite.

When the world looks at Israel's actions in the Palestinian Occupied Territories, the only reaction it expresses is that of shock. Whether in Jenin, Nablus or Rafah, an acquaint-

tance British Jewish heart consultant said the Israeli actions expose Jews the world over to ugly criticism. These actions frame the "nation of victims", as Israelis claim, as victimisers.

The fact is that the Israelis going out with cap in hand begging for sympathy is no longer working. Many Jews in the Diaspora fear the consequences in different forms. This is often reflected by many European Jewish writers and the silent majority of Jews, whose loyalty to Israel is unquestionable. So, has Europe become anti-Semitic again?

Not necessarily. The number of anti-Semites has fallen rather increased. Please ignore the rising power of the racist right in certain European countries. These people's anger and hate is not directed against Jews only, but it targets all other minorities and newly immigrants, including Muslims.

The situation of some suburbs of Paris where Muslim presence exists and which is often cited as an example of the rise of anti-Semitism, is a quite different matter altogether. When French North African Muslims clash with their fellow North African Jewish French citizens, they are transporting the Arab-Israeli conflict to the European territories.

Therefore, when Europe criticises Israel, it is basically criticising its government's policy. No one should confuse criticism of Ariel Sharon's policies with the old pattern hatred of Jews. Most Europeans don't.

Similarly, it is no longer possible to mislead European public through the exploitation of the Holocaust for political purposes. Things have drastically changed since the former right-wing Israeli prime minister, Menachem Begin compared the Palestinian Yasser Arafat in besieged Beirut in 1982 Israeli invasion, to Hitler in his Berlin bunker.

Since there is no better idea than the two-state solution, Europe's policies towards the Arab-Israeli conflict do not need to change. The challenge is to translate EU financial support into greater influence and to be player, not just a payer.

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