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# **Israel and the European Union: A Troubled Relationship**

**Prof. Robert Schütze**

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Supervisor

**Ludovica Tagliaferri - 089302**

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Candidate

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*To my family and friends, who stood by my side during this journey*

*A special thanks to my grandfather, my biggest supporter*

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## Introduction

Over the years, Israel and the European Union have had a “love-quarrel” relationship, which resulted from several historical factors, such as the Holocaust, the position held by Europe with regards to the Palestinian question and the role of the United States in influencing Israel’s foreign policy. “These factors, among others, have pushed Israel to behave more as an island in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean than a Mediterranean country neighbouring the European continent”.<sup>1</sup> Despite everything, the Jewish state and the European Union ended up developing ever-closer ties in a number of fields, especially scientific and economic. It is worth mentioning that the EU figures among the biggest trading partners of Israel indeed, accounting for approximately 29% of its trade in goods in 2020. About 35% of Israel’s imports came from the EU and nearly 22% of the country’s exports went to the EU.<sup>2</sup>

From the political point of view, both Israel and the European Union have expressed the desire to strengthen their bonds and foster dialogues in order to include the Jewish state in the European project. Despite the relevance of the relationship between Israel and the European union, the literature does not offer many studies entirely focused on the subject, and the present dissertation aims to fill this gap, by providing an accurate analysis of the development of the EU-Israeli relations, starting from the early 1950s. The opening chapter covers the main events which have characterized their historical background, with a special focus on the Arab-Israeli conflict, during which the EU played a marginal role in the multilateral efforts to resolve it. The chapter explores the Israeli policies designed to deal with the Palestinian question as well as the European responses to such measures and discusses how they had an impact on the nature of their relations.

The second chapter addresses the development of the EU-Israeli partnership, by focusing on the 1995 Association Agreement and the “rules of origin” dispute, which started in 1997. Such dispute contributed to raise tensions between the parties, as the European Union clearly revealed its disapproval towards Israel’s measures against the Palestinians. In spite of the very unstable period, the parties still wanted to cooperate, such that they signed the EU-Israel Action Plan in 2004, within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The document was a major step in the right direction, because it was conceived to enhance their economic as well as scientific

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<sup>1</sup> Sharon Pardo and Joel Peters, “*Uneasy Neighbours: Israel and the European Union*”, Lexington Books, 2010, 1.

<sup>2</sup> European Commission, May 6, 2021.

<https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/israel/>

partnership. The chapter concludes by analysing the Luxembourg Declaration and the upgrade process of the relations between Israel and the EU which, in the end, was frozen following Israel's military offensive against Palestinians.

The third chapter turns to the defence and security field and provides both Israeli and European perspectives on some of the most relevant global security challenges. The chapter opens with an in-depth analysis of the main European strategies, and it follows by exploring Israel's nuclear strategy, mainly based on nuclear deterrence. Over the years, Israel has never admitted nor refused to have nuclear weapons and the ambiguity of its policies has generated several debates within the international community. In this respect, the present dissertation will analyse Israel's stance on nuclear proliferation, offering the main insights which drove its foreign policy. The chapter goes on by addressing the responses of the Jewish state and Europe to the Iranian nuclear project, in order to give a comprehensive overview of their strategic thinking.

To conclude, some evaluations and personal considerations about the partnership between Israel and the European Union will be provided, stressing the achievements as well as the shortcomings of their complex relationship. Both of them revealed to be excellent trading partners and showed commitment in the development of programs and activities concerning, above all, the scientific field. The next step to strengthen their ties would consist in enhancing their cooperation in the security as well as the political areas, in order to face the imminent global threats which affect the region. The future of the EU-Israeli relations should be based on a new interchange of ideas and consistent solutions. Further discussions about their convergent and divergent values will be the key requirement for a strong and long-lasting relationship.

## Chapter I – EU-Israeli Relations: An Historical Background

### 1.1 Israel's Interest in Europe

Since the very beginning, the State of Israel was willing to establish diplomatic relations with other global actors, in order to be involved in the international community, gain legitimation and further protection from the surrounding Arab countries. Given its close proximity to Europe, Israel started to consider a strategic alliance with European countries towards the end of the 1950s, when Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion revealed to be really interested in joining the European Defence Community (EDC). The EDC should have been a supranational institution established by the Treaty of Paris, signed in 1951 by the three Benelux countries (Belgium, Luxemburg and the Netherlands), France, West Germany and Italy. The agreement, which envisaged a European army designed to ensure security in case of aggression<sup>3</sup>, never entered into force, due to significant discordance between the parties.

Still in the hope of integrating Europe, the Member States established the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1957, also known as the Common Market. Ben-Gurion fiercely promoted this initiative, pointing out that “the establishment of a closely-knit community would become a central force in world affairs”<sup>4</sup> and urged the Jewish state to engage in full diplomatic relations with it. However, Israeli Ambassador in Brussels, Gideon Rafael, had difficulties in pursuing the Prime Minister’s objective, because the EEC seemed unwilling to take up “far-reaching commitments extending to non-member states”<sup>5</sup>. In 1960, Israel openly expressed its desire to become an associate member of the regional organization and, by referring to article 238 of the Treaty of Rome, remarked that the Community could conclude agreements with third parties and create associations “embodying reciprocal rights and obligations, joint actions and special procedures”.<sup>6</sup>

Nonetheless, the idea of the Association Agreement was completely excluded by the EEC, fearing that the Jewish state’s suggestion could jeopardize its relations with the Arabs, undermine its economic interests and “encourage other states to present similar requests”.<sup>7</sup> The negotiations

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Schütze, *“European Union Law”*, Cambridge University Press, 2018, 10.

<sup>4</sup> Efraim Inbar, *“Israel’s Strategic Agenda”*, Routledge, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Gideon Rafael, *“Destination Peace: Three Decades of Israeli Foreign Policy - A Personal Memoir”*, Stein and Day, New York, 1981, 100.

<sup>6</sup> Treaty of Rome, March 25, 1957, 78. [https://ec.europa.eu/romania/sites/default/files/tratatul\\_de\\_la\\_roma.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/romania/sites/default/files/tratatul_de_la_roma.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Heimann, Gadi. *“The Need to Be Part of Europe: Israel’s Struggle for an Association Agreement with the EEC, 1957–1961”*, *Israel Studies* 20, no. 1, 2015, 87. Accessed June 1, 2021.

between Israel and the European countries finally came to an end in 1964, with the signing of a limited commercial agreement, which consisted in “the reduction of the national tariffs of some of the member countries for certain products and the liberalization of the regulations on the import of several other articles”.<sup>8</sup> Such agreement was not very important from an economic point of view, but it was one step ahead in developing closer ties between the parties. At that time, the Member States were not taking Israel’s bid as a priority because they were mostly concerned with establishing a unified Europe<sup>9</sup>. Therefore, even if the EEC was economic in nature, it had well-defined political purposes.

The Jewish state’s project of integration in the international community was hindered by several other reasons, above all the determination of the surrounding Arab countries to isolate the Israelis from both the political and the economic domains. In this respect, the Arab League established a specific office in Belgium, designed to prevent Israel from joining the Common Market, monitor the activities of the regional organization and strengthen the relations between the Member States and the Arab world<sup>10</sup>. Despite everything, the European Economic Community showed an open attitude towards Israel in the years that followed, such that they signed their first Free Trade Agreement in 1975, which established the reduction of the Jewish state’s import duties on goods coming from the EU Market.

## 1.2 The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Taking Side

The Arab-Israeli conflict was “undoubtedly one of the most protracted and intractable conflicts of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries”<sup>11</sup> and thus caught the attention of many international actors eager to play a role in the dispute. The first efforts of the European countries to design a policy towards the Palestine question date back to the 1973 October War, during which the European Community openly gave support to the Jewish state. As retaliation, the members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) decided to impose an oil embargo on European powers, bringing about an inevitable crisis in the Western world. As the Arabs exported

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<sup>8</sup> Kula P., “*Israel and the EEC Initiated a Trade Agreement*”, in Sharon Pardo and Joel Peters, “*Israel and the European Union: A Documentary History*”, Lexington Books, 2012, 28.

<sup>9</sup> Yedioth Ahronoth, by Michael Sheridan, their correspondent in Belgium, 2 November 1966.

<sup>10</sup> Israel State Archives, letter by the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Israeli Ambassador to Brussels Yitzhak Minerbi, Jerusalem, 1965.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Whitman and Stefan Wolff, “*The European Union as a Global Conflict Manager*”, Routledge, 2012.

more than 75% of their oil to Europe, the Member States opted for changing the paradigm of their Arab-Israeli policy.<sup>12</sup>

The European Community arranged then a meeting in Copenhagen and issued a joint statement, based on the UN Resolution 242, which placed particular emphasis on the need for Israel to stop acquiring territories by force and respect the legitimate rights of the Palestinians to “live in peace with secure and recognized boundaries”.<sup>13</sup> The Jewish state was urged to revise its policies, which were considered to be too aggressive and not even in line with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, and it was encouraged to recognize a State of Palestine which, from a European perspective, was the most effective solution for restoring peace and stability in the Middle East region. Last but not least, the joint statement highlighted the importance of engaging in peace negotiations “within a UN framework, which was a pro position that had always met strong opposition from Israel”.<sup>14</sup>

Following the stance that the Member States took in the conflict, the Arabs decided to lift the oil embargo and, in 1973, the European Economic Community and the Arab League engaged in the first Euro-Arab Dialogue, for discussing relevant issues of common concern. The conference system was “designed to explore the ways and means of establishing an interregional partnership”<sup>15</sup> and aimed at intensifying their relations in several fields. Yet, while the Europeans were eager to address economic issues, the Arabs hoped to entirely focus the forum on the management of the Middle East conflict. The potential intensification of the relations between the Arab League and the EC was viewed with scepticism by the US authorities, who wanted to prevent Europe from interfering in the Palestinian question.

The strategy which the United States adopted in the Middle East was based on the gradual resolution of the conflict. In 1978, the US president, Jimmy Carter, who underpinned the Jewish state’s integration in the region<sup>16</sup>, promoted negotiations between Egypt and Israel and organized a targeted three-party conference. The meeting resulted in the signing of the Camp David Accords

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<sup>12</sup> Mohamed El-Sayed Selim, “*The European Union and the Arab-Israeli conflict: In search of a new approach*”, Al-Siyassa Al-Dawlia Quarterly (Cairo: Al Ahram Foundation), October 2010.

<sup>13</sup> Declaration of the Nine Foreign Ministers of 6 November 1973, in Brussels, on the Situation in the Middle East, 1. <https://fransamaltongvongeousau.com/documents/cw/CH5/12.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Patrick Müller, “*EU Foreign Policymaking and the Middle East Conflict*”, Taylor & Francis Ltd, October 7, 2012.

<sup>15</sup> Alan R. Taylor, “*The Euro-Arab Dialogue: Quest for an Interregional Partnership*”, Middle East Journal 32, no. 4, 1978, 429. Accessed June 1, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4325796>.

<sup>16</sup> Osama Anter Hamdi, “*American Foreign Policy toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict: Strategic Transformations*” Insight Turkey 20, no. 2, 2018, 258. Accessed June 1, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26390316>.



which, on one hand, provided guidelines for a peace settlement between Egypt and the Jewish state and, on the other hand, offered a plan conceived to establish an independent government authority for West Bank and Gaza.<sup>17</sup> The Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty was finally signed in 1979, calling for the dismantlement of the Jewish settlements in Sinai as well as the establishment of diplomatic relations between the parties, which represented a great strategic achievement for Israel.

### 1.2.1 The Venice Declaration.

The European Community did not want to hinder the American efforts to bring peace in the Middle East, but it desired to be more involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Its ambition to take the initiative culminated in the issuing of the Venice declaration, in 1980, which is one of the most important documents outlining the European approach to the Palestinian question. Considering the interests and the traditional ties that the Member States and the Arabs shared, the European Community maintained that its contribution in the region was highly needed and required a more pragmatic strategy.<sup>18</sup> The European countries declared that the Israeli occupation of Arab territories represented one of the major obstacles to the peace process and that “the renunciation of violence by all parties constituted a basic element for a comprehensive settlement of the conflict in the Middle East”.<sup>19</sup>

Beyond stressing the importance of recognizing Palestinians’ right to self-determination, the Venice declaration highlighted the necessity to involve the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in future negotiations. Moreover, the Member States condemned any unilateral decision which could have changed the status of the city of Jerusalem and encouraged the freedom of access to all sacred sites. The document marked the official beginning of the troubled relationship between the Jewish state and Europe because, since then, Israel completely lost confidence in the European countries and believed that their involvement in the resolution of the conflict was to be avoided. In particular, Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin asserted that “nothing will remain of the Venice Resolution but its bitter memory. Israel does not seek a guarantee for its security from any European nation”.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Naidu, A. G. "*Camp David Accords: A Study in American Foreign Policy*", *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 53, no. 3, 1992, 405. Accessed June 2, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41855619>.

<sup>18</sup> Venice declaration, June 13, 1980, 1.

[https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/mepp/docs/venice\\_declaration\\_1980\\_en.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/mepp/docs/venice_declaration_1980_en.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, June 13, 1980.

Throughout the 1980s, the members of the European Community issued other declarations against Israel and its policies, especially after the invasion of Lebanon, in 1982, and the harsh repression of the 1987 Palestinian revolt, also known as the First Intifada. The documents kept on stressing the same principles the European countries were fighting for but did not contribute to enhance their political role in the dispute, so much so that they “remained bystanders at successive peace initiatives”.<sup>21</sup> The United States, on the contrary, had an ever-increasing influence in the region and became the major mediator of the Arab-Israeli conflict. In 1991, the US President George W. Bush, alongside with the President of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, convened a peace conference in Madrid and Israel, Syria, Lebanon and a Jordan-Palestine delegation were invited to participate.

The conference aimed at preparing for bilateral and multilateral dialogues, which “run on two parallel tracks: direct talks between Israel and the neighbouring states, and direct talks between Israel and the Palestinians”.<sup>22</sup> The European Community attended the meeting just as an observer and, as a consequence, played a marginal role. The Member States were disappointed with the small consideration they were given in this respect because, from their point of view, the EC represented a great example to follow. Their community embraced the essential principles of collaboration, transparency, unity and integration which should be the basis for a peaceful settlement in the Middle East. In the end, the Madrid Conference confirmed many of the provisions the European Community had already suggested, such as the importance of involving the PLO in future peace negotiations.

### 1.2.2 The Oslo Process.

The Oslo process, which started in 1993 after the mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO, showed that there were the conditions for putting an end to hatred and violence. The peace process led to “the withdrawal of Israeli forces from parts of the Gaza strip and West Bank, and the establishment of a Palestinian Interim Self-Government Authority”.<sup>23</sup> The newly born European Union was not invited at all to the peace process but decided to give its contribution by offering financial support to the Palestinians. In very few years, the European countries managed to design

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<sup>21</sup> Taylan Özgür Kaya, “*The Middle East Peace Process and the EU: Foreign Policy and Security Strategy in International Politics*”, London: I.B. Tauris, 2013.

<sup>22</sup> “*The Madrid Peace Conference*”, *Journal of Palestine Studies* 21, no. 2, 1992, 119. Accessed June 2, 2021. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2537235.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A054d4bb0b570f4db1df4d4baaf244d9>

<sup>23</sup> Taylan Özgür Kaya, “*The Middle East Peace Process and the EU: Foreign Policy and Security Strategy in International Politics*”, London: I.B. Tauris, 2013.

an effective and strategic economic program, which made them among the biggest donors in the world. At the Washington Conference to Support the Middle East Peace, which took place in October 1993, “the EU promised 38% of the US \$2.4 billion pledged at the meeting (the US pledged 22%; Japan 9%; the World Bank 7% and Saudi Arabia 4%)”.<sup>24</sup>

The Member States hoped that their economic assistance could contribute to get a more relevant political role in the Middle East region. They were really impressed by the development of the Jewish state’s economy and even praised its success in the Research and Development (R&D) field. Israel, for its part, gradually changed its perceptions on Europe and finally maintained that it was time to leave aside past hatred. In 1994, the European heads of States met in Essen and declared that the Jewish state should enjoy a special status, on the basis of their traditional values.<sup>25</sup> The peak of their relations was reached with the signing of the 1995 EU-Israel Association Agreement (AA) which, beyond replacing the Free Trade Agreement they had signed in 1975, it also envisioned the free movements of goods and the mutual cooperation in economic and social issues of common concern.

At the same time, the EU was trying to develop its own strategies in a more multilateral framework, in order to strengthen its international position and urge the Middle East and the North African countries to interact with each other. In 1995, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) was launched, following the adoption of the Barcelona Declaration. The initiative aimed at boosting dialogue and cooperation between populations of different cultures and traditions and was conceived to develop their economies by means of the generous funding of the European Union and the creation of a new free-trade area. The Barcelona Declaration underlined that “this Euro-Mediterranean initiative was not intended to replace the other activities and initiatives undertaken in the interests of the peace, stability and development of the region, but it would contribute to their success”.<sup>26</sup>

The 1990s were characterized by a number of unpleasant events which brought about instability in the region and the death of more than a hundred people. Israel endured several terrorist attacks at the hand of Palestinian and Israeli extremists, such as Yigal Amir, responsible for the murder of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995. After the new legislative elections, Benjamin

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<sup>24</sup> Miller Rory, *Troubled Neighbours: The EU and Israel*, Israel Affairs, 2006, 12:4, 642-664.

<sup>25</sup> Council of the European Union, “European Council Meeting on 9 and 10 December 1994 in Essen. Presidency Conclusions”, 1994.

<sup>26</sup> Barcelona Declaration, November 28<sup>th</sup>, 1995.  
[https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/euromed/docs/bd\\_en.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/euromed/docs/bd_en.pdf)

Netanyahu became new Prime Minister of Israel and encouraged the country to implement targeted and concrete policies against the Palestinians. He disagreed with the Oslo Accords and wanted the European Union to stay out of the issues concerning the Middle East because, from his point of view, it was too biased to be a good promoter of peace.

Due to the firm stand of the Israeli Prime Minister, the Member States feared that the newly established EU-Israeli Association Agreement could be hindered. Against this background, the EU appointed Miguel Ángel Moratinos as special envoy to the Middle East, in order to monitor the evolution of the events in the region. Such strategy was highly criticized by the Israelis, who regarded it as another failed attempt of the Europeans to become peace brokers. Given the Jewish state's detachment and unwillingness to cooperate, the Member States decided to issue the 1999 Berlin declaration, in which they reiterated the necessity of establishing a peaceful State of Palestine nearby Israel, on the basis of the already existing agreements. According to the European Union, a two-state solution would guarantee Israel's security and "Israel's acceptance as an equal partner in the region".<sup>27</sup>

The Berlin declaration is known to be one most explicit EU documents in defence of the independence of the State of Palestine<sup>28</sup> and it was designed to raise awareness about the mutual violence that both countries were carrying out. The Israelis condemned the European attempts to interfere in the Arab-Israeli conflict, aiming to determine the possible outcomes of a peace process which was still far from being achieved. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu underlined that the Palestinians could not be trusted and was surprised that "Europe, where a third of the Jewish people were killed, took a stand which put Israel at risk and went against its interest".<sup>29</sup> In his opinion, the Jewish state had already shown its availability to engage in peaceful dialogues with the Arabs, but they did not stop from attacking Israeli cities and citizens.

### 1.3 The Post-Oslo Era.

The second Palestinian uprising started on the 28<sup>th</sup> of September of 2000 and led the Jewish state to build a security wall in order to separate it from the West Bank. Israel's strategy to protect its territory was condemned by many countries' leaders because it implied the further expansion of

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<sup>27</sup> Council of the European Union, "Berlin European Council", 1999.

<sup>28</sup> Guy Harpaz, "The EU's New Approach to the Two-State Solution in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: A Paradigm Shift or PR Exercise?" *Leiden Journal of International Law* 30, no. 3, 2017, 60.  
doi:10.1017/S0922156517000218.

<sup>29</sup> *Jerusalem Post*, March 26, 1999.

the Jewish state on Palestinians' land. From the point of view of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the measure was even illegal because its construction put at risk the life of the people working or living nearby. The Member States of the EU gave support to the final judgement of the ICJ, arguing that the Jewish state was not entitled to seize Palestinian land and demolish houses with the purpose of preserving its national safety. In response, Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom asserted that the EU did not understand the urgent need to combat terrorism and remarked that "Israel was particularly disappointed by the European stand. The EU should focus its efforts in promoting Palestinian reform, and not support Palestinian manipulation in the United Nations".<sup>30</sup>

The rising tensions in the external environment led to the creation of the Middle East Quartet in 2002, a new coalition between the United Nations, Russia, the United States and the European Union. This grouping of countries and international entities committed to working on the so-called Roadmap plan, which boosted Palestinian reforms and the Jewish state's withdrawal from Gaza and the West Bank in order to establish a State of Palestine which could live in peace nearby Israel. The above-mentioned Roadmap called for the mutual collaboration between Israelis and Palestinians on multiple fields, namely politics, economics, humanitarian aid and security, and it was based on performance, meaning that practical actions and implementation were fundamental steps to take.<sup>31</sup> Since Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon had little confidence in the Roadmap plan, he proposed to unilaterally disengage from Gaza and the West Bank in 2004, with the full approval of the United States.

The Member States were initially sceptical towards Sharon's strategy, fearing that it could replace the original framework for peace, but, in the end, they welcomed his initiative, and, by September 2005, Israel completely withdrew from Palestinian territories. The European leaders had respect and admiration for Sharon, who truly believed in a brighter future for the Middle East. Javier Solana, who was the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, remarked that the Israeli Prime Minister kept his promises and did so professionally. Additionally, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) implemented this complex operation without causing any potential damage. "There was a government decision here, approved by the parliament, and that is how a democratic country behaves".<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Israel: UN Vote Encourages Palestinian Terrorism", *Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 2004.

<sup>31</sup> Nathalie Tocci, "The EU, the Middle East Quartet and (In)effective Multilateralism", June 2011, 9. [https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/mercury-epaper\\_09.pdf](https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/mercury-epaper_09.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> *Ha'aretz*, August 30, 2005, in Rory Miller, "Troubled Neighbours: The EU and Israel", October 1, 2006, 650.

Towards the end of 2005, the Palestinian Authority and Israel signed the Agreement on Movement and Access (AMA), “which aimed at promoting peaceful economic development and improving the humanitarian situation on the ground”.<sup>33</sup> They decided to have an external party monitoring the Rafah Crossing Point, which was located on the Gaza-Egyptian border, and, in this regard, the EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) was established, contributing to increase the role of the European Union within the region. Brussels also committed to offering economic assistance to the Palestinians in order to further develop their security system. Things changed when Hamas, an acronym of the Islamic Resistance Movement, took legitimately power in 2006, after the new Palestinian free elections. Since Hamas rejected “the principles of non-violence, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the Roadmap”,<sup>34</sup> the EU had no choice but to impose hefty sanctions on it and suspend all the financial aid. The increasing tensions culminated in the outbreak of a new civil war in 2008, shortly after the launch of an Israeli raid in Gaza.

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<sup>33</sup> Agreement on Movement and Access, November 15, 2005, 2.  
[https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/IsraelOPT\\_AgreedDocumentsOnMovementAccessGaza2005.pdf](https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/IsraelOPT_AgreedDocumentsOnMovementAccessGaza2005.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> Statement by the Middle East Quartet, January 30, 2006.  
<https://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/354568CCE5E38E5585257106007A0834>

## Chapter II – The Development of the EU-Israel Partnership

### 2.1 The 1995 EU-Israel Association Agreement

The EU-Israel Association Agreement (AA) was stipulated in 1995 and it is considered to be one of the most important documents concerning the relationship between the European Union and Israel. The text aimed at developing the Jewish state's economy by regularly interacting with the EU, which was one of the most important trading blocs in the world at that time, and it envisioned the "prohibition of custom duties on exports and imports and any charges having equivalent effect between the Community and Israel".<sup>35</sup> Even though the Association Agreement was economic in nature, it covered a wide range of areas. The parties committed to cooperating in the design of sustainable and eco-friendly initiatives, exchanging information on security issues and strengthening their scientific and technological partnership, which resulted in the signing of the Research and Development Agreement, on the 31<sup>st</sup> of October of 1995. Since then, Israel started to actively contribute to EU's programs and engaged in the development of a number of innovative projects.

The Association Agreement provided a series of rules and guidelines in order to regulate and supervise the banking system<sup>36</sup> and envisaged a regular dialogue between the European Union and the Jewish state thanks to the establishment of an Association Council which was supposed to meet every year to touch on relevant issues concerning both bilateral and multilateral aspects. As far as the social area was concerned, the parties facilitated the procedures of employment of Israeli and European workers and addressed questions related to workplace safety, gender equality, unemployment and rehabilitation services.<sup>37</sup> The Jewish state and the European Union seized the opportunity to reiterate the traditional values which characterized them but did not explain how they could work together on the design of common policies and the guarantee of future and long-term relations.

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<sup>35</sup> 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, June 21, 2000.

[https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/default/files/association\\_agreement\\_israel-eu\\_2000.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/default/files/association_agreement_israel-eu_2000.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> Sharon Pardo and Joel Peters, "*Uneasy Neighbours: Israel and the European Union*", 2012, 49.

<sup>37</sup> 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, June 21, 2000.

The Association Agreement was formally linked to the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, whose key objective was the “establishment of a common framework for governing relations between the European Union and its neighbours on the Southern shores of the Mediterranean”,<sup>38</sup> but the document only referred generally to such region, by urging countries to cooperate in order to coexist peacefully and maintain economic stability. The agreement mainly focused on the development of the bilateral relations between the Jewish state and the European Union and, remarkably, it did not make any reference to the Middle East peace process, leaving many policy-making circles puzzled. In fact, this omission made it difficult to understand the position of the European countries with respect to the conflict, even if there was the widespread belief that the EU was starting to adopt the Jewish State’s perspectives.

### 2.1.1 The Rules of Origin Dispute

The position of the European Union towards Israeli policies revealed to be clear during the “rules of origin” dispute, which began in 1997. This principle is of utmost importance in commercial agreements because it “functions as a differentiating mechanism to determine whether a particular discriminatory arrangement will be applied to a given product in international trade”<sup>39</sup> and thus makes sure that tariff concessions are granted to the goods manufactured by the parties of the agreement. In this respect, the European custom authorities raised the issue as to whether the goods produced in the territories which Israel had occupied, namely Gaza and the West Bank, were to be considered as “legal” and thus worthy of custom benefits. In order to check if such Israeli goods were in compliance with the terms of the EU-Israel Association Agreement, the EU called for further verifications of their origin and, given that the European countries questioned again the legality of Israel’s settlements, new tensions arose between them in the years that followed.

The rules of origin of goods were outlined in the Fourth Protocol of the Association Agreement. This section established the criteria determining the categories of all traded products and it made a distinction between goods entirely manufactured in Israel<sup>40</sup> and those “which had undergone sufficient working and processing”<sup>41</sup> in the Jewish state. Any good which, for the most part, was

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<sup>38</sup> Brigid Gavin, “The Euro-Mediterranean partnership: An experiment in North-South-South integration”, *Intereconomics*, ISSN 0020-5346, Springer, Heidelberg, Vol. 40, Iss. 6, 2005, 353.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10272-005-0165-0>

<sup>39</sup> Moshe Hirsch, “*Rules of Origin as Trade of Foreign Policy Instruments? The European Union Policy on Products Manufactured in the Settlements in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip*”, *Fordham International Law Journal*, Volume 26, Article 4, 2002, 574.

<sup>40</sup> EU-Israel Agreement, *supra* n.3, Protocol 4, art. 2, 1995.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*



produced somewhere else, was regarded to be violating the rules of origin set by the Protocol. The Fourth Protocol applied to both European and Israeli territories but, in fact, failed in clarifying whether Israel's occupied areas were entitled to have the already mentioned custom benefits. The European Commission discussed at length about this issue and, in 1998, it finally declared that "neither Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, nor East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, could be considered as part of the State of Israel".<sup>42</sup>

Israel, for its part, argued that all the occupied territories were under its jurisdiction and, as a result, it had the legitimate right to legally supervise Palestinian trade with other countries, as even reported in the Protocol on Economic Relations the Jewish state had signed with the PLO in 1994. The Israelis additionally remarked that the Association Agreement established a single customs union, suggesting that also goods produced in its settlements had to be considered as "made in Israel". The rules of origin dispute ended up being a political rather than an economic issue. The Jewish state was fed up with Europeans claims to "define its borders on their behalf"<sup>43</sup> while the European Union stood firm on the idea that any good coming from West Bank and Gaza and destined to European countries may give rise to sanctions. In the end, the EU-Israel Customs Cooperation Committee allowed the Jewish state to label the products manufactured in the occupied areas as "made in Israel", provided that their place of origin was carefully specified.

The rules of origin dispute, which marked a very important period in the history of the relations between the European Union and Israel, came to an end in 2005, when the European Commission decided to impose a customs duty on all goods produced in the territories that Israel had occupied after 1967. By and large, it is worth mentioning that the EU economic policy towards the Jewish state was shaped by the political dynamics. Indeed, there was not a consistent policy implemented for goods produced in the West Bank and in the Gaza strip but rather a series of decisions taken according to the political situation. The decision to raise the question upon the origin of goods stemmed from Netanyahu's hostile attitude as well as the missed advancement in the peace dialogue between Israel and the Palestine Authority.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> The Commission's Communication cites Article 38 of the EC-Israel Interim Agreement that is reproduced in Article 83 of the 1995 EU-Israel Agreement. Implementation of the Interim Agreement on Trade and Trade-Related Matters between the European Community and Israel, June 1998.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Wybe Th. Douma, "Israel and the Palestinian Authority", in *"The European Union and Its Neighbours: A Legal Appraisal of the EU's Policies of Stabilisation, Partnership, and Integration"*, ed. Steven Blockmans and Adam Lazowski, The Hague: T.M.C Asser Press, 2006, 447.

<sup>44</sup> Moshe Hirsch, "Rules of Origin as Trade or Foreign Policy Instruments? The European Union Policy on Products Manufactured in the Settlements in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip", 2002, 588.

## 2.2 The European Neighbourhood Policy

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was an initiative launched by the European Union in 2004, in order to guarantee safety and security within the countries which were in close proximity to Europe. The purposes of the ENP were initially shared by the European Council in 2003, when it presented the European Security Strategy (ESS), which was based on the need to counter terrorism, the organized crime and the spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The Member States understood that it was in their interest to prevent neighbours from having violent conflicts, unsustainable growth of the population and low standards of living, which may be problematic for their domestic stability.<sup>45</sup> Stronger and well-governed countries on the European countries' borders would have contributed to ensure overall prosperity. While the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was based on the principle of regionality, the ENP was precisely designed to “avoid drawing new dividing lines in Europe”<sup>46</sup> and distinguished itself for its bilateral approach, which allowed to build up relationships between the Member States and their neighbours on a more individual basis.

Interestingly, all those countries which had an advanced economy and were developed from a political point of view, could also have the opportunity to upgrade their relations with the European Union. The Jewish state highly praised the initiative because it got the chance to become a closer partner of the EU without being a formal member and, thus it could maintain its own sovereignty. In this context, Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom pointed out that “a new and warmer wind was blowing from the Northern shores of the Mediterranean”<sup>47</sup>. Even Günter Verheugen, who was a European commissioner, recognized the great importance of cooperating with Israel, given its developed economy and ever-increasing role in the political sphere. In 2003, he declared that “the Jewish state is a natural partner for the EU in the new neighbourhood policy and although it is somewhat untypical of the countries that fall within our neighbourhood, our relations will be tailor-made”.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> European Security Strategy, December 12, 2003.

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/30823/qc7809568enc.pdf>

<sup>46</sup> European Commission, “*Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours*”, March 11, 2003, 104.

<sup>47</sup> Silvan Shalom, “*Address by Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom to the European Union Council of Ministers*”, Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, July 21, 2003.

<https://mfa.gov.il/mfa/pressroom/2003/pages/address%20by%20fm%20silvan%20shalom%20before%20the%20european%20un.aspx>

<sup>48</sup> David Kriss, “*Commissioner Verheugen: Israel as a Natural Partner for EU in Neighbourhood Policy*”, in Pardo S. and Peters J., “*Israel and the European Union: A Documentary History*”, Lexington Books, 2012, 59.

### 2.2.1 The EU-Israel Action Plan

In the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy, Brussels concluded several bilateral Action Plans with other states, and it offered financial support as long as the targeted countries carried out political, social or economic reforms. Israel and the European Union gave favourable consideration to the development of a joint Action Plan, in spite of their widely divergent objectives. While the Member States aimed at gaining a more prominent role in peace negotiations and wanted Israel to follow the principles drawn up in the Roadmap, the Israeli negotiators did not want to engage in any political commitment and were more interested in improving their economic ties with European countries. All things considered, the EU-Israel Action Plan (AP) was finally signed in 2004, representing the first agreement to be adopted by the European Commission.

The document, which will remain in force until January 2022, was highly welcomed by both parties, being a major step to bring them closer. In 2005, the EU commissioner for External Relations and the ENP, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, stressed the importance of such a great achievement and underlined that Israel was one of the most active economic partners of the EU, considering that slightly more than 45% of Israeli imports came from the European Union and approximately 30% of Israel's exports were destined to the Union market. In this respect, also Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom praised the above-mentioned Action Plan and asserted that the Jewish state and the European Union had a "strengthened platform for dialogue and cooperation on enhancing mutual trade and investment, promoting war on terrorism, the fight against anti-Semitism and many other common objectives, included the Middle East Peace".<sup>49</sup>

All the initiatives indicated in the Action Plan were based on the fundamental principles that Israel and the EU had in common, such as the rule of law and the preservation of human rights, which would be the basis for addressing the Palestinian question and drawing up a political agenda. Ferrero-Waldner emphasized the importance of taking strategic decisions to pave the way for a peaceful resolution of the conflict and therefore urged the Jewish state to both cease its expansion towards Palestinian territories and desist from demolishing houses, remarking that "all these actions were in Israel's own long-term interests".<sup>50</sup> Both parties to the agreement committed to fighting

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<sup>49</sup> David Kriss, "European Neighbourhood Policy: Israel Action Plan Endorsed", in Pardo S. and Peters J., "Israel and the European Union: A Documentary History", Lexington Books, 2012, 60.

<sup>50</sup> European Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood policy Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Tel Aviv, November 10, 2005.

against racism and coordination in the safeguard of the minority groups by promoting initiatives designed to educate people to respect other cultures and religions.

The EU-Israel Action Plan also encouraged cooperation in the “non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the fight against terrorism, as well as the prevention and resolution of conflicts in the region and beyond”,<sup>51</sup> and implied more commitment in controlling the transit of radioactive and nuclear material, such as uranium or plutonium, within national borders. Both parties had to develop effective security systems and impose sanctions in the event that the export controls were breached.<sup>52</sup> Such collaboration was to be based on the “EU Strategy against proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction”, which was a declaration which the European Council had issued in 2003 and which paid particular attention to the imminent risk that terrorist organizations may get nuclear arms.

Israel was reluctant to include the foregoing provisions in the Action Plan and downplayed the issue by remarking that it would have maintained its current parameters. As a consequence, any relevant bilateral discussion over non-proliferation was achieved, leading to inevitable growing tensions between the parties. The European Union, which regarded that clause of utmost importance, reminded the Jewish state of the necessity to make compromises if the Action Plan was to be implemented. In response, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs highlighted that in the Barcelona Declaration it had already agreed on “preventing the proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons through adherence to and compliance with international and regional non-proliferation regimes and the various arms control and disarmament agreements.”<sup>53</sup> Still today, however, many experts think that Israel does possess nuclear weapons, even though it never revealed so.

The Action Plan called for the Jewish state’s involvement in several EU initiatives, such as the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Program, which would open up great opportunities to develop trade and increase services and investments. Both Israel and European Union aimed at guaranteeing prosperity and, beyond facilitating the economic flows, boosted further collaboration in the scientific areas of research. Anyway, the document, which became the hallmark of the relations between Israel and the European Union, lacked benchmarks for developing such relations

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<sup>51</sup> EU/Israel Action Plan, May 1, 2004, 2.

[https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/eu-israel\\_action\\_plan\\_2005.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/eu-israel_action_plan_2005.pdf)

<sup>52</sup> Ivi, 6.

<sup>53</sup> “Barcelona Declaration on Euro-Mediterranean Partnership”, 1995.

[https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/euromed/docs/bd\\_en.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/euromed/docs/bd_en.pdf)

and it did not provide any concrete strategy to implement the programs. Furthermore, the language used in the Action Plan was remarkably vague and resulted in contrasting interpretations.

### 2.3 The Upgrade of the Bilateral Relations

In 1994, the European heads of state had met in Essen and had issued the Essen declaration, arguing that Israel should have enjoyed a “special status”, on account of its highly developed economy. The Essen declaration, which represented a great achievement in terms of commercial affairs between the Jewish state and the Member States, was signed during a very unstable period. At that time, Israel constantly feared imminent Palestinian attacks and was deeply concerned with developing effective strategies to counter terrorism. Indeed, the idea of urging closer relations with the European Union originated from the need of increasing the Jewish state’s overall security. In 2006, Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni delivered a speech in which he shared his future perspectives on the relationship between Israel and the EU, underlining that “the road should ultimately lead to a significant participation of Israel in the European integration project”.<sup>54</sup>

One year later, the Member States promoted the creation of a “Reflection Group”, which was conceived to boost bilateral cooperation in the most relevant areas, and, on the 16<sup>th</sup> of June of 2008, the EU-Israel Association Council finally met in Luxembourg and accepted an upgrade of the EU-Israeli relations. The program envisaged Israel’s involvement in regular meetings, in particular with the Political and Security Committee (PSC), and urged the Jewish state to be familiar with the EU *acquis communautaire*, consisting in the legislation and the judgements of the European Court of Justice, in order to “bring the Israeli society and economy closer to European norms and standards”.<sup>55</sup> The project was also intended to allow Israel to take part in the European Single Market, so as to raise competitiveness among firms and increase overall economic prosperity. The parties stated that the willingness to intensify their bonds “stemmed from the awareness of their traditional links, their cultural and human values, and the economic and security interests that they shared”.<sup>56</sup>

The Luxemburg Declaration stood out from previous statements because it had implications. The EU leaders underlined that “such a partnership implied a stronger involvement of the European

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<sup>54</sup> Tzipi Livni, “*Israel and the European Union in the Enlarged Neighbourhood*,” Europe in BGU Newsletter, March 2007, 1- 4.

<sup>55</sup> Sharon Pardo and Joe Peters, “*Uneasy Neighbours: Israel and the European Union*”, Lexington Books, 2010, 66.

<sup>56</sup> Eight Meeting of the EU-Israeli Association Council, Luxembourg, June 16, 2008, 1.

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004\\_2009/documents/dv/association\\_counc/association\\_council.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/dv/association_counc/association_council.pdf)

Union in the peace process and in the monitoring of the situation on the ground”.<sup>57</sup> Further guidelines for the implementation of the program were provided in Brussels, where the EU specified in detail the path that was to be followed in order to enhance its partnership with Israel. Besides the annual meetings between the respective Foreign Ministers, it was fundamental to systematically exchange information and the advice of security experts, to integrate Israel in the international community, to cooperate in the fight against anti-Semitism and to stand up for the respect of human rights. In addition, the State of Israel was required to contribute to the work of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) and to comply with the requirements set by the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).

In 2008, the EU decided to freeze the discussions related to the upgrade process following Israel’s decision to launch a military offensive against Hamas, known as the Operation Cast Lead, which resulted in the killing of more than 1400 Palestinians and about 10 Israelis. Ferrero-Waldner condemned the Jewish state’s stance, arguing that “living up to past agreements, including those made in the context of multilateral forums, was essential”<sup>58</sup> to cease hatred and violence. Nevertheless, from an Israeli perspective, the recognition of a State of Palestine would have not been enough to stop Hamas from attacking Israeli cities. The EU’s solution would have been acceptable just in case Israel had “defence guarantees, such as the demilitarization of the future Palestinian State”.<sup>59</sup>

Since 2009, other agreements were ratified by Israel and the European Union, among them a protocol regarding the fundamental principles that should have characterized Israel’s involvement in European programmes, and an agreement on agricultural products, designed to increase Israeli exports of more than 15%. In 2010, the Jewish state and the European Union signed a third document, known as the Agreement on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance of Industrial Products (ACAA), which consisted in the free movement of certain Israeli industrial products destined to the European Market so as to facilitate trade.<sup>60</sup> In this framework, the EU-Israel Association Council was still ready to take advantage of the opportunities outlined in the current Action plan.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Eight Meeting of the EU-Israeli Association Council, Luxembourg, June 16, 2008, 1.

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004\\_2009/documents/dv/association\\_counc/association\\_council.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/dv/association_counc/association_council.pdf)

<sup>58</sup> Benita Ferrero-Waldner, “*The Offer on the Table*”, Haarets, April 17, 2009.

<sup>59</sup> Tsilla Hershco, “*Israel-EU Security and Defence Relations in the Context of the Arab Spring*”, 2014, 3. <https://journals.openedition.org/bcrfj/7306>

<sup>60</sup> Agreement on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance of Industrial Products (ACAA), May 10, 2010. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32013D0001>

<sup>61</sup> EU-Israel 10<sup>th</sup> Association Council. Statement of the European Union, February 22, 2011.

## Chapter III – Israel and the EU: Perspectives on Global Security Challenges

### 3.1 The European Security Strategy

After the 9/11 attacks, the European Union realized that it was necessary to adopt strategies at the local level embracing a global perspective. This is because the globalization era made countries all over the world more interconnected and increased social mobility, contributing to the growth of violent events and terrorism. In this context, the EU decided to distance himself from American policies, based on pre-emptive coercion, and called instead for “preventive engagement”.<sup>62</sup> The European Security Strategy paper (ESS) was presented on the 8<sup>th</sup> of December 2003 by Javier Solana, who was the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy. The document outlined the most salient issues to be taken into consideration and defined effective and targeted policies to tackle the major international threats. “Europe was ready to share in the responsibility for global security and in building a better world”.<sup>63</sup>

The European countries committed to facing “their security priorities in a framework that emphasized multilateral institutions, specifically the UN and regional organizations, and the rule of law, upholding the principle of the use of force as a last resort”.<sup>64</sup> Given the relevance attributed to both the United Nations Charter and the UN Security Council, the tight collaboration between the Member States and the UN was deemed to be fundamental indeed. The approach to security of the European Union embodied the idea that “international relations had to be organized through strong, negotiated, and enforceable multilateral regimes”,<sup>65</sup> and it was based on both the resolution of conflicts by peaceful means and the promotion of democracy in order to maintain overall stability. In the course of time, the credibility and effectiveness of the EU became evident, in the light of “the increasing convergence of European interests and the strengthening of mutual solidarity”<sup>66</sup>, which made it a great global player.

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<sup>62</sup> Karen E. Smith, “*A European Union global strategy for a changing world?*”, May 2, 2017, 507. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/s41311-017-0041-0>

<sup>63</sup> European Council, “*A Secure Europe in a Better World: European Security Strategy*”, Luxembourg, December 12, 2003, 3.

<sup>64</sup> Gerrard Quille, “*The European Security Strategy: a framework for EU security interests?*”, January 24, 2007, 1.

<sup>65</sup> Espen Barth Eide, “Effective Multilateralism: Europe, Regional Security and a Revitalised UN”, The Foreign Policy Centre, 2004, 2.

<sup>66</sup> European Council, “*A Secure Europe in a Better World: European Security Strategy*”, Luxembourg, December 12, 2003, 3.

The European Security Strategy paper highlighted the global threats which could highly affect regional stability, and which could not be predicted most of the time. Terrorist organizations, for instance, had networks which allowed their members to stay in contact and interact with one other constantly, posing many challenges to the authorities in charge of monitoring their actions. In addition, the risk that terrorists could get nuclear weapons was of primary concern, considering the global damage that may be generated. Indeed, if on the one hand, the development of technology and biological sciences did improve the lifestyle of citizens, on the other it may represent a major threat, because the eventual development of chemical or nuclear weapons could bring about much more suffering and victims than conventional ones.

The achievement of peace in the Middle East region was another strategic priority that was to be achieved, since the Arab-Israeli conflict “persisted on Europe’s borders and threatened regional stability”.<sup>67</sup> The Member States have long maintained that a two-state solution was the key solution to the issue, but its implementation required the support and the collaboration of the United States, the Jewish state and the Arab countries. The ESS pointed out that “the European Union must remain engaged and ready to commit resources to the problem until it is solved”.<sup>68</sup> Besides designing policies against organized crime and boosting the development of security partnerships, the Member States also committed to launching strategic initiatives in order to intensify the share of information between countries and improve their national defence. Mutual cooperation was required to strengthen the capacities of the intelligence services and enhance cyber security institutions around the world and the European Union made its own contribution.

### 3.2 The European Union Global Strategy

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of June of 2016, the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, launched the European Union Global Strategy (EUGS), which was meant to replace the European Security Strategy, because “our wider region was becoming more unstable and more insecure and the crises within and beyond our borders were affecting directly the citizens’ life”.<sup>69</sup> The Member States decided then to opt for a more concrete and pragmatic strategy, which could represent a “realistic assessment of the Union’s external action”<sup>70</sup> and which could be based upon the coordination of common actions through strong engagement and partnership. Mogherini

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<sup>67</sup> Sharon Pardo and Joel Peters, *Uneasy Neighbours: Israel and the European Union*, 2010, 78.

<sup>68</sup> European Council, *A Secure Europe in a Better World: European Security Strategy*, 10.

<sup>69</sup> *A Global Strategy for the European Union*, the European External Action Service (EEAS), August 10, 2018.

<sup>70</sup> Andrea Frontini, *The EU Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy: A Short Guide for the Perplexed*, July 12, 2016.



underlined that none of the European countries could manage to tackle the current global threats alone and stressed that just a more united Europe fighting for common interests would have achieved the Member States' shared security goals.

The European Union Global Strategy embraced the concept of strategic autonomy, which referred to “the ability of Europe to make its own decisions, and to have the necessary means, capacity and capabilities available to act upon these decisions, in such a manner that it is able to properly function on its own when needed”.<sup>71</sup> Strategic autonomy required a certain degree of internal unity, which could be achieved by adopting democratic standards and by endorsing greater national investments in security and defence capabilities. This “implied further economic and political engagement, and a rethinking of how such engagement was to be pursued”.<sup>72</sup> The Member States were now determined to build a more autonomous Europe and strengthen their position in the international system.

In the framework of the EUGS, the European countries strongly called for state and societal resilience to face periods of crises and overall difficulties. Resilience, which was deemed to be the “perfect middle ground between overambitious liberal peace-building and the under-ambitious objective of stability”,<sup>73</sup> consists in dealing effectively with imminent internal and external conflicts, proving that both states and societies are able to withstand and rapidly recover from crises. In order for countries to grow and develop, a strong commitment to resilience-building was extremely needed, through long-term cooperation and an on-going engagement. Usually, foreign and security policies embrace the concept of resilience, especially when it comes to manage natural or man-made disasters, provide humanitarian aid and deal with post-conflict reconstruction.<sup>74</sup>

The European countries also highlighted the necessity of developing an approach based on integration, which referred to the prompt response of the EU at every stage of a conflict. In this regard, the Member States would have “invested in prevention, resolution and stabilisation, and would have avoided premature disengagement”.<sup>75</sup> As the resolution of conflicts could not be

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<sup>71</sup> Dick Zandee et al., “European Strategic Autonomy in Security and Defence – Now the going gets tough, it’s time to get going”, December 2020, 8.

<sup>72</sup> Nathalie Tocci, “*European Strategic Autonomy: What it is, Why We Need It, How to Achieve It*”, 2021, 6.

<sup>73</sup> Wagner, Wolfgang and Rosanne Anholt, “*Resilience as the EU global strategy’s new leitmotif: Pragmatic, problematic or promising?*”, 2016, 415.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13523260.2016.1228034>

<sup>74</sup> Elena A. Korosteleva and Trine Flockhart, “*Resilience in EU and international institutions: Redefining local ownership in a new global governance agenda*”, *Contemporary Security Policy*, 2020, 41:2, 157.

<sup>75</sup> “*Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe - A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign And Security Policy*”, June 28, 2016, 28-29.

achieved without the involvement of all the interested parties, the European Union fostered multilateral cooperation at the national and global level and the establishment of comprehensive agreements based on responsibility and mutual assistance. Moreover, the EU decided to “step up its contribution to Europe’s collective security, working closely with its partners, beginning with NATO”,<sup>76</sup> in order to better address common security threats.

The European Union “made a renewed commitment to a multilateral system of global governance, based on international law”,<sup>77</sup> and realized the importance of increasing its credibility in the context of security and defence, by coordinating a quicker response to imminent crises. In the course of time, the European countries acknowledged that soft power was not enough to face the current global issues that were affecting the region and worked, therefore, on a more pragmatic strategy. Furthermore, the Member States strongly supported the implementation of disarmament and the establishment of multilateral non-proliferation treaties, which were considered to be fundamental in order to both ensure collective security and pursue the ultimate goal of developing a nuclear-free zone.

### 3.3 Israel’s Nuclear Strategy

Since the early 1950s, Israel based its nuclear strategy on ambiguity, by neither admitting nor denying having nuclear weapons of mass destruction. This doctrine represented a strategic necessity, which was not designed to generate a nuclear challenge with the neighbouring Arab states, but rather it was intended to “instil fear that Israel may have nuclear capability to inflict insufferable damage at any time should it feel existentially threatened”.<sup>78</sup> In 1958, the Jewish state started to build a secret nuclear reactor and research facility, known as the Shimon Peres Negev Nuclear Research Centre, in the Negev desert, near the city of Dimona. Not until the beginning of the 1960s, the United States Intelligence Community (IC) managed to discover the Israeli project and, as a consequence, it subjected the nuclear installation to inspections, without achieving great results though.

The Jewish state guaranteed that the Dimona reactor was meant to conduct research into the atomic science field, but still today many security experts argue that its real purpose consists in the

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<sup>76</sup> “*Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe - A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy*”, June 28, 2016, 9.

<sup>77</sup> Liliana Reis Ferreira, “*Implementing the Global Strategy for the EU’s Foreign and Security Policy*”, Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA), February 12, 2020, 2.

<sup>78</sup> Alon Ben-Meir, “*Israel’s response to a nuclear Iran*”, *International Journal on World Peace*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2010, 72. Accessed 28 May 2021. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/20752917](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20752917).

production and the development of atomic weapons. Indeed, “it is assumed within the Western scientific community that Israel possesses the sophisticated technical capacity to construct atomic weapons from their plutonium”.<sup>79</sup> It should be noted that in the course of time the Jewish state has fought against the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and even joined, among other things, the Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and Under Water in 1963. Israel also voted in favour of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1968 but, in the end, refused to sign it. The ambiguity of Israel’s strategic thinking has thus generated many doubts on the position of the Jewish state in the international debates on nuclear safety and the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Israel’s has openly declared, on several occasions, that it won’t be the first country to start a nuclear conflict, unless there is an imminent threat to its survival, and it has repeatedly stated that its main policy objective consists in the promotion of peace in the Middle East. In this respect, the Jewish state is determined to stop any attempt by the Arab states to develop nuclear weapons capabilities, as happened in September 2007, when the Israeli Air Force bombed an alleged nuclear site in Syria, which had been built by North Korea. In other words, herein lies the wisdom of the Israeli nuclear deterrence. “Fear of Israel’s nuclear capability has played a major role in subduing Arab goals of destroying Israel and in compelling the Arab world to come to terms, albeit reluctantly, with Israel’s existence. Israel’s nuclear policy has both constrained Arab aggression and facilitated opportunities for peace diplomacy”.<sup>80</sup>

### 3.3.1 The Non-Proliferation Regime: Israel’s Position

Israel did not want to sign the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) because it did not regard it as an adequate means to the current circumstances, supporting the view that “the existing political setting in the Middle East and the structure of relations between states made unilateral adherence to international agreements on arms control and disarmament unreliable”.<sup>81</sup> The Jewish state supported its claim by pointing out that even though Iraq, Syria and Iran ratified the NPT, they were still carrying out their clandestine nuclear programs and thus violating the provisions therein contained.

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<sup>79</sup> J. Bowyer Bell, "Israel's Nuclear Option", Middle East Journal 26, no. 4, 1972, 380. Accessed May 30, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4324984>.

<sup>80</sup> Guy Ziv, "To Disclose or Not to Disclose: The Impact of Nuclear Ambiguity on Israeli Security", Israel Studies Forum 22, no. 2, 2007, 84. Accessed May 30, 2021.

<sup>81</sup> Ran Marom, "Israel's position on non-proliferation", Policy Studies, 1986, 65.

On the basis of the non-compliance by these member states, Israel did not believe that its national security would be enhanced by joining the NPT and did not regard it as a goal in itself<sup>82</sup>.

The Jewish state has opted for a more pragmatic approach with regards to regional security, “rooted in the belief that the broad range of security concerns of all regional members should be taken into account and addressed realistically within a direct regional dialogue”.<sup>83</sup> Such dialogues should be based on confidence and trust building processes, which are key aspects in the design of an effective security strategy towards an area regularly affected by humanitarian crises, conflicts and wars. Last but not least, the concerned countries should engage in mutual recognition, which was deemed to be a prerequisite for long-lasting partnerships working on the establishment of a zone free of nuclear and chemical weapons.<sup>84</sup> Still today, many Arab states refuse to recognize the Jewish state, posing problems for the development of potential programs.

For its part, Israel has expressed its willingness to cooperate with the neighbouring Arab countries in the elaboration of a work plan to handle the most relevant security challenges in the region, above all the Iranian ambition to get nuclear weapons and the cooperation between Syria and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) in the nuclear field, considering that they had previously built together a secret nuclear reactor. In the light of these threats, the Jewish state joined the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism (GICNT), which is a project aimed at both preventing terrorist organizations from getting or transporting nuclear weapons and improving national responses to terrorist attacks involving the use of radioactive materials. According to Israel, “today, more than ever, nuclear security and safety must be at the forefront of global concern, because threats to nuclear security and safety know no boundaries”.<sup>85</sup>

### 3.4 Case Study: The Iranian Nuclear Project

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<sup>82</sup> Zafary-Odiz M., “The Israeli National Perspective on Nuclear Non-proliferation” In: Maiani L., Abousahl S., Plastino W. (eds) “*International Cooperation for Enhancing Nuclear Safety, Security, Safeguards and Non-proliferation*”, Springer Proceedings in Physics, vol 206. Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg, 2018, 117. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-662-57366-2\\_18](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-662-57366-2_18)

<sup>83</sup> First Committee, 72<sup>nd</sup> UN General Assembly, Statement by Mr. Eran Yuvan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Thematic discussions on Nuclear Weapons, United Nations, New York, October 13, 2017, 2. <https://www.un.org/disarmament/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/statement-by-israel-72-nw.pdf>

<sup>84</sup> Merav Zafary-Odiz, “The Israeli National Perspective on Nuclear Non-proliferation” In: Maiani L., Abousahl S., Plastino W. (eds) “*International Cooperation for Enhancing Nuclear Safety, Security, Safeguards and Non-proliferation*”, Springer Proceedings in Physics, vol 206. Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg, 2018, 139. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-662-57366-2\\_18](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-662-57366-2_18)

<sup>85</sup> Zafary-Odiz M., “The Israeli National Perspective on Nuclear Non-proliferation”, in: Maiani L., Abousahl S., Plastino W., “*International Cooperation for Enhancing Nuclear Safety, Security, Safeguards and Non-proliferation*”, Springer Proceedings in Physics, vol 206. Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg, 2018, 141. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-662-57366-2\\_18](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-662-57366-2_18)

The Iranian ambition to acquire nuclear weapons posed a great danger to both Israel and the European Union, but still, they did not manage to design a joint strategy to tackle the issue. Since 2003, the European countries engaged in regular commercial exchanges with Iran, up to be great trading partners, and Israel complained that they were underestimating the Arab state's determination to carry out its clandestine nuclear project.<sup>86</sup> It is against this background that, in 2009, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu decided to visit Europe to personally attest the progress that Iran made in the development of radioactive and nuclear materials, on the basis of official reports conducted by the intelligence officers of the Jewish state.

As soon as the European Union found out that Iran possessed a secret uranium enrichment facility in the city of Qom, its approach to the Arab country completely changed. Along with the United States, the EU decided to impose a wide range of sanctions on Iranians, considering the systematic violation of the resolutions adopted by the UN Security Council and designed to prevent them from enriching uranium in order to develop nuclear weapons. The sanctions mainly consisted in restrictions on international trade, financial systems, and both the transport and the energy sector but, in the end, part of them was lifted, following the engagement of the P5+1, that is the US, Russia, China, France, the UK and Germany, in the Joint Plan of Action with Iran, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of November of 2013.

As reported in the agreement, “the Council would suspend certain EU restrictive measures against Iran for a period of six months”<sup>87</sup> and the Arab country would undertake a series of measures related to its nuclear program. This framework would be an exhaustive resolution of the problem, since it would allow Iran to use its nuclear energy in accordance with the articles of the NPT<sup>88</sup> and it would also provide the basis for potential negotiations of a long-term agreement. Many Israeli officials, including Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, had little confidence in Iran's alleged collaboration and thus urged the United States as well as the European Union to adopt more coercive measures towards the country. The Jewish state tried to convey that the possibility of a

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<sup>86</sup> Ben-Meir, Alon. “*Israel's response to a nuclear Iran*”, *International Journal on World Peace*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2010, 66. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/20752917](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20752917). Accessed 28 May 2021.

<sup>87</sup> Council of the European Union, “*Iran: EU suspends certain sanctions as Joint Plan of Action enters into force*”, January 20, 2014, 1.

<sup>88</sup> Joint Plan of Action, November 24, 2013, 1. [https://www.armscontrol.org/files/Iran\\_P5\\_1\\_Nuclear\\_Deal\\_131123.pdf](https://www.armscontrol.org/files/Iran_P5_1_Nuclear_Deal_131123.pdf)

nuclear Iran would have brought about unimaginable consequences and, therefore, it even “started to consider military action against Iran to overpower Tehran’s nuclear efforts”.<sup>89</sup>

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of July of 2015, the EU’s High Representative Federica Mogherini welcomed a “ground-breaking nuclear deal”<sup>90</sup> between Iran, the European Union and the P5+1, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), “which will ensure that Iran’s nuclear program will be exclusively peaceful, and mark a fundamental shift in their approach to this issue”.<sup>91</sup> Under the document, more restrictions to the Arab country’s nuclear project would be placed in exchange for the suspension of all previous sanctions and all the nuclear-related measures adopted by Iran would be subject to the control of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The JCPOA also imposed further limitations on the activities concerned with enriching uranium and conducting research and envisioned the parties’ commitment to cooperate for the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

The agreement specifically established that Iran could not enrich uranium up to 3,67% until 2030 so that to jeopardize its nuclear program.<sup>92</sup> Some years later, the IAEA reported that the Arab state was systematically violating the provisions set in the JCPOA by surpassing the limit imposed. In 2018, the US President Donald Trump decided then to withdraw from the agreement and to unilaterally impose hefty sanctions on Iran, at the Jewish state’s urging. The European Union, for its part, firmly condemned Trump’s withdrawal, being worried that it could undermine the diplomatic efforts to stop Iran’s nuclear ambitions. Above all, the Member states feared that the failure of the JCPOA could have had a negative impact on the relations they managed to establish with Iran over the years.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Nicos Panayiotides, “*Is the “Arab Spring” Israel’s Winter? Strategic Instability in the Middle East*”, March 2012, 32.

<sup>90</sup> Erik Jessen, “*European Diplomacy in the Iran Nuclear Negotiations: What Impact Did It Have?*”, 2017, 1.

<sup>91</sup> Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, July 14, 2015, 1.

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/122460/full-text-of-the-iran-nuclear-deal.pdf>

<sup>92</sup> Alireza Nader, Ali G. Scotten and James Hoobler, “*Iranian Domestic Challenges to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action*”, 2017, 1.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep02423.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Ae3b939072d1070d0fb89cb069c596b63>

<sup>93</sup> Radosław Fiedler, “*Iran and the European Union after the Nuclear Deal*”, CES Working Papers, ISSN 2067-7693, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Centre for European Studies, Iasi, Vol. 10, 2018, 303.

<https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/198546/1/ceswp-v10-i3-p291-305.pdf>

## Conclusion

Israel and the European Union have engaged in numerous joint cooperative ventures over the past thirty years and have developed solid business activities. In 2020, their total trade was worth approximately €31.0 billion and mainly consisted in medical equipment and raw materials. The goods which the EU imported from Israel accounted to nearly €12 billion, while those exported to the Jewish state amounted to €19.5 billion.<sup>94</sup> Israel is currently one of the key partners of the EU in the research and development (R&D) field and, since 1996, it has also been associated with the European Framework Program for Research and Technological Development. For its part, the EU has become “Israel’s second-biggest source of research funding, after the Science Foundation”,<sup>95</sup> and has proved to be an active partner of the Jewish state in the area of Information Communication Technology (ICT).

At the political level, the EU-Israeli relations revealed to be very conflicting though. On the one hand, Israel openly expressed its desire of being integrated in the European project but, on the other hand, it had little confidence in European policies and tried to marginalize the EU in the peace process, considering it to be biased and to solely act in Palestinians’ interests. Added to this is the Israeli belief of the growth of anti-Semitism in Europe and the unwillingness of the Europeans to design effective measures to prevent terrorism in the Jewish state. The EU, in turn, has always been resentful of the small consideration it was given in the Israeli-Arab negotiations and heavily criticized the way in which the Jewish state was dealing with the Palestinian question, regarding its military measures as disproportionate and not even in compliance with international law. From a European perspective, Israel should take more into account people’s human rights and not just focus on the military superiority.

Without questions, these conflicting trends have had an impact on the nature of the Israeli-European relations, which consisted of apportioning blame without finding mutual understanding. The EU has tried to act on the global stage, but the United States has had a more pivotal role in handling the Palestinian question. According to the Europeans, “the conflict should be settled through a two-state arrangement for its Israeli-Palestinian dimension, complemented by peace agreements between Israel and its Arab neighbours on the principle of land for peace as well as

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<sup>94</sup> European Commission, May 6, 2021.

<https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/israel/>

<sup>95</sup> Sharon Pardo and Joel Peters, “*Uneasy Neighbours: Israel and the European Union*”, Lexington Books, 2010, 112.

peaceful, neighbourly relations between Israel and the wider Arab and Muslim world”,<sup>96</sup> but this solution has been rejected by the Israelis, arguing that the Arab-Israeli conflict could not be resolved in the near future.

The friction between the EU and the United States over policy choices designed to handle the most relevant global challenges, such as the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Iranian nuclear program, has contributed to further widen the gap between the Jewish state and the European Union. The United States will probably continue to have an influence in Israeli thinking and will act as the main external player in the diplomatic efforts to bring the Palestinian question to an end. The Jewish state and the European Union should go beyond the economic and scientific cooperation and find common ground even in the political and security fields, in order to counter the common global threats which affect the region. A new European-Israeli dialogue, based on the open and frank exchange of ideas and opinions, is then needed to better understand their different perspectives and to lay the foundations for a trustful and long-standing geopolitical relationship.

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<sup>96</sup> Muriel Asseburg, “*The Arab Spring and the Arab Israeli Conflict: A Vicious Circle of Mutually Reinforcing Negative Repercussions*”, in: Sven Biscop/Rosa Balfour/Michael Emerson (eds.), “*An Arab Springboard for EU Foreign Policy?*”, Brussels: Egmont, January 2012, 89.



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## Abstract

Nel corso degli anni, Israele e l'Unione Europea hanno avuto un rapporto di “amore-odio”, frutto di diversi fattori storici, come l'Olocausto, la posizione assunta dall'Europa nella questione palestinese e il ruolo degli Stati Uniti nell'influenzare le politiche israeliane. Malgrado le loro divergenze, Israele è divenuto uno dei più grandi collaboratori dell'Unione Europea, specialmente in ambito scientifico e economico, tanto che, nel 2020, circa il 35% delle merci israeliane proveniva dall'Europa e quasi il 20% delle esportazioni del Paese erano destinate all'EU. Nonostante la grande importanza del rapporto tra Israele e l'Unione Europea, non ci sono attualmente molti studi interamente focalizzati sull'argomento e, quindi, la presente tesi si propone di colmare questa lacuna, fornendo un'analisi accurata dello sviluppo delle loro relazioni bilaterali.

Sin dall'inizio, Israele desiderava integrarsi nella comunità internazionale, sia affinché fosse maggiormente riconosciuta sia per avere una maggiore protezione contro i vicini Paesi arabi. Lo Stato ebraico aveva quindi iniziato a considerare una potenziale alleanza con i Paesi europei verso la fine degli anni '50, quando il primo ministro israeliano, David Ben-Gurion, si era mostrato particolarmente interessato a prendere parte alla Comunità Economica Europea (CEE), anche conosciuta come Mercato Comune, che diversi Paesi europei avevano istituito nel 1957. Israele aveva apertamente proposto agli Stati Membri di diventare un "membro associato" della CEE, ma la richiesta fu da loro respinta, temendo che ciò avrebbe potuto compromettere i loro interessi economici e politici. Pertanto, la CEE, sebbene fosse nata come un'organizzazione economica, mirava soprattutto a unire e a fortificare l'Europa.

Agli esordi degli anni '70, il conflitto arabo-israeliano, considerato uno dei più intrattabili del XXI secolo, aveva attirato l'attenzione delle potenze europee, desiderose di svolgere un ruolo nella controversia. Nel 1973, quando scoppiò la guerra del Kippur, i Paesi europei si erano schierati dalla parte di Israele, ma quando i membri arabi dell'Organizzazione dei Paesi Esportatori di Petrolio (OPEC) imposero un embargo delle esportazioni di petrolio in Occidente per rappresaglia, gli Stati Membri furono costretti a cambiare la loro politica estera. La Comunità Europea, comprendendo che la soluzione più efficace per ristabilire la pace in Medio Oriente sarebbe stata quella di riconoscere lo Stato di Palestina, aveva esortato Israele a rivedere le proprie politiche, ritenute troppo aggressive e non in linea con i principi della Carta delle Nazioni Unite. Data la nuova posizione dei Paesi europei, gli arabi decisero di revocare l'embargo petrolifero nel 1974.

La potenziale intensificazione dei rapporti tra la Comunità Europea e gli Stati arabi preoccupava le autorità statunitensi, che cercavano di impedire agli Stati Membri di intervenire nella questione palestinese. Il presidente degli Stati Uniti, Jimmy Carter, aveva supportato una strategia basata sulla graduale risoluzione del conflitto e, nel 1978, si era impegnato nel promuovere negoziati tra Egitto e Israele, che portarono poi alla firma degli accordi di Camp David. Questi prevedevano sia un trattato di pace tra Egitto e Israele, raggiunto poi nel 1979, sia un piano per l'istituzione di un Governo autonomo nel territorio palestinese. La Comunità Europea non mirava ad ostacolare gli sforzi americani nel portare la pace in Medio Oriente, bensì desiderava essere maggiormente coinvolta nella risoluzione del conflitto e la sua ambizione di prendere l'iniziativa si manifestò nel 1980, anno in cui i Paesi europei emisero la dichiarazione di Venezia.

I Paesi europei, oltre a evidenziare la necessità di riconoscere i diritti dei palestinesi e di coinvolgere l'Organizzazione per la liberazione della Palestina (OLP) nei futuri negoziati, aveva anche condannato qualsiasi decisione unilaterale che potesse modificare lo status di Gerusalemme. Dopo questa dichiarazione, gli israeliani avevano perso completamente fiducia negli Stati Membri e l'inizio del loro travagliato rapporto iniziò ufficialmente. Nel corso degli anni '80, la Comunità Europea aveva continuato a rilasciare diverse dichiarazioni contro Israele e le sue misure, in particolare in seguito all'invasione del Libano, nel 1982, e alla dura repressione della prima rivolta palestinese del 1987. Nonostante ciò, la Comunità Europea finì per avere un ruolo marginale nelle successive iniziative di pace, mentre gli Stati Uniti vantavano un'influenza sempre maggiore nella regione.

Il processo di Oslo, iniziato nel 1993 dopo il mutuo riconoscimento tra Israele e l'Organizzazione per la Liberazione della Palestina (OLP), aveva dimostrato che c'erano i presupposti per mettere fine all'odio e alla violenza. Il processo prevedeva il ritiro degli Israeliani da diverse zone della striscia di Gaza e della Cisgiordania e l'istituzione di un Governo autonomo palestinese. Sebbene l'Unione Europea, creata nel 1993, non fosse stata invitata al processo di pace, aveva deciso di dare ugualmente il suo contributo offrendo sostegno economico ai palestinesi e, in pochissimi anni, era riuscita a mettere a punto un programma efficace che la fece divenire uno dei più grandi donatori. Nel corso degli anni, una serie di tragici eventi, tra cui l'assassinio del primo ministro israeliano Yitzhak Rabin, avevano generato instabilità regione. Benjamin Netanyahu, divenuto nuovo primo ministro, considerava che fosse arrivato il momento di agire e progettare politiche mirate contro i palestinesi.

Durante la seconda rivolta palestinese, avvenuta il 28 settembre del 2000, Israele decise di costruire un muro di sicurezza per separare lo Stato ebraico dalla Cisgiordania. Gli Stati Membri dell'UE avevano criticato la misura dello Stato ebraico, sostenendo che non potesse impadronirsi dei territori palestinesi e demolire le loro case per preservare la propria sicurezza. Le crescenti tensioni avevano portato alla nascita del Quartetto per il Medio Oriente, nel 2002, che comprendeva le Nazioni Unite, la Russia, gli Stati Uniti e l'Unione Europea. Questo gruppo si era impegnato a lavorare sul cosiddetto piano Roadmap, che promuoveva nuove riforme in territorio palestinese e il ritiro di Israele da Gaza e dalla Cisgiordania con lo scopo di stabilire lo Stato di Palestina. Alla fine, il primo ministro israeliano, Ariel Sharon, decise di ritirarsi unilateralmente da Gaza e dalla Cisgiordania, ottenendo così il pieno sostegno degli Stati Uniti e dell'Unione Europea.

Nel 1995, l'EU e Israele stipularono l'Accordo di associazione (AA), che mirava a sviluppare l'economia dello Stato ebraico. Sebbene l'accordo fosse di natura economica, in realtà copriva un'ampia gamma di settori. Le parti si erano impegnate a cooperare nella progettazione di iniziative sostenibili ed eco-compatibili, nello scambio reciproco di informazioni sulla sicurezza e nel settore scientifico e tecnologico. Dopo la firma dell'Accordo di Ricerca e Sviluppo, avvenuta il 31 ottobre del 1995, Israele aveva iniziato a contribuire attivamente ai programmi dell'UE e ad impegnarsi nello sviluppo di progetti innovativi. Il testo prevedeva anche un dialogo regolare tra l'Unione Europea e lo Stato ebraico attraverso l'istituzione di un Consiglio di associazione, che avrebbe dovuto riunirsi ogni anno per discutere questioni di interesse comune riguardanti aspetti sia bilaterali che multilaterali. L'Accordo di associazione poneva l'accento sui valori tradizionali che caratterizzavano Israele e i Paesi europei, ma non spiegava come questi avessero potuto elaborare politiche comuni per delle solide relazioni a lungo termine.

Verso la fine degli anni '90, le autorità doganali europee avevano sollevato la questione dell'origine delle merci di Israele, non sapendo se i prodotti provenienti dai territori che Israele aveva occupato, ossia Gaza e la Cisgiordania, e diretti ai mercati europei, dovessero essere considerati "legali" e degni quindi di benefici doganali. L'UE aveva chiesto così ulteriori verifiche e, avendo messo nuovamente in discussione la legalità degli insediamenti israeliani, sorsero nuove tensioni tra di loro. Le regole di origine erano state delineate nel quarto protocollo dell'Accordo di associazione, che faceva una distinzione tra le merci interamente prodotte in Israele e quelle che, per la maggior parte, erano state realizzate nello Stato ebraico. I beni che, ai sensi del protocollo, non rientravano in questa sezione non avevano diritto ai benefici doganali.

Israele, da parte sua, aveva chiarito che tutti i territori occupati erano sotto la sua giurisdizione e che quindi, come anche riportato nel protocollo sulle relazioni economiche che lo Stato ebraico aveva firmato con l'OLP nel 1994, aveva il diritto di controllare il commercio palestinese con altri Paesi. Gli israeliani avevano inoltre osservato che l'Accordo di Associazione prevedeva un'unica unione doganale, suggerendo dunque che anche le merci prodotte in Cisgiordania e nella Striscia di Gaza dovevano essere considerate "made in Israel". La disputa sulle norme di origine, che ha segnato un periodo molto importante nella storia delle relazioni tra l'Unione Europea e Israele, giunse al termine nel 2005, quando la Commissione Europea decise di imporre un dazio doganale su tutte le merci prodotte nei territori che Israele aveva occupato dopo il 1967.

Per garantire una maggiore sicurezza all'interno dei Paesi prossimi all'Europa, l'UE lanciò la Politica Europea di Vicinato nel 2004. Il progetto si distingueva per il suo approccio bilaterale e consentiva agli Stati Membri di rafforzare i loro legami con i Paesi vicini. Lo Stato ebraico aveva elogiato grandemente l'iniziativa, avendo la possibilità di diventare un partner stretto dell'UE senza essere un membro ufficiale e di mantenere così la propria sovranità. Tuttavia, mentre i Paesi europei miravano ad avere un ruolo più rilevante nei negoziati di pace tra gli israeliani e i palestinesi, lo Stato ebraico non era disposto a impegnarsi in questioni politiche ed era più interessato a migliorare i propri rapporti economici con l'UE. Nello stesso anno, Israele e gli Stati Membri firmarono un Piano d'Azione, che era il primo nell'ambito della Politica Europea di Vicinato ad essere stato adottato dalla Commissione Europea.

Il documento, che rimarrà in vigore fino a gennaio 2022, era stato accolto con favore da entrambe le parti. Nel 2005, il commissario UE per le Relazioni Esterne e la PEV, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, aveva sottolineato l'importanza di questo grande risultato, assicurando che Israele fosse uno dei partner più attivi dell'UE, dato che poco meno del 50% delle importazioni israeliane provenivano dall'Unione Europea e circa il 30% delle esportazioni dello Stato ebraico era destinato al mercato europeo. Tutte le iniziative indicate nel Piano d'Azione si basavano sui principi fondamentali che Israele e l'UE avevano in comune, come lo stato di diritto e la salvaguardia dei diritti umani, e esortavano le parti a collaborare sulla non proliferazione delle armi di distruzione di massa e la lotta al terrorismo.

Tra le altre cose, il Piano d'Azione incoraggiava lo Stato ebraico a prendere parte ai diversi progetti dell'UE, come il Programma quadro per la competitività e l'innovazione, che avrebbe aperto grandi opportunità per sviluppare il commercio e avrebbe aumentato i servizi e gli investimenti.



Israele che l'Unione Europea, che miravano a garantire prosperità e a facilitare i flussi economici, si impegnarono a rafforzare la loro collaborazione, soprattutto nel settore scientifico. Nonostante ciò, il documento mancava di punti di riferimento per lo sviluppo a lungo termine delle relazioni tra l'Unione Europea e lo Stato ebraico e non forniva alcuna strategia concreta per l'attuazione dei programmi. Inoltre, il linguaggio utilizzato nel Piano d'Azione era notevolmente vago e aveva portato a interpretazioni contrastanti.

Nel 1994, i capi di Stato europei si erano incontrati ad Essen e avevano dichiarato che Israele doveva essere degna di uno “status speciale”. L'Unione Europea aveva così incoraggiato l'istituzione di un “Gruppo di riflessione” al fine di potenziare la cooperazione bilaterale nelle aree più rilevanti. Il 16 giugno del 2008, il Consiglio di associazione UE-Israele decise finalmente di portare avanti l'iniziativa e rilasciò la dichiarazione di Lussemburgo. Questa si era distinta dalle precedenti dichiarazioni perché aveva delle implicazioni, soprattutto in riferimento al ruolo dell'UE nei negoziati di pace tra palestinesi e israeliani. Al di là degli incontri annuali tra i rispettivi Ministri degli Esteri, era fondamentale poi scambiare sistematicamente le informazioni e i consigli degli esperti di sicurezza, integrare lo Stato ebraico nella comunità internazionale e battersi per il rispetto dei diritti umani. Tuttavia, dopo che l'esercito israeliano lanciò l'operazione “Piombo fuso” contro Hamas nel 2008, non furono convocati più incontri tra i ministri e i parlamentari europei e israeliani.

All'inizio del XXI secolo, l'Unione Europea si era resa conto che, per garantire la sicurezza interna, era necessario adottare strategie a livello locale con una prospettiva globale. L'8 dicembre del 2003, l'Alto rappresentante per la politica estera e di sicurezza comune, Javier Solana, aveva presentato al Consiglio Europeo il documento sulla Strategia europea in materia di sicurezza, che delineava le questioni più salienti da tenere in considerazione e definiva politiche mirate per affrontare le attuali minacce internazionali, come il terrorismo e la proliferazione delle armi nucleari, che potevano causare molte più sofferenze e vittime di quelle convenzionali. Anche la risoluzione del conflitto arabo-israeliano era una questione importante da affrontare, perché minacciava costantemente la stabilità regionale. Gli Stati Membri avviarono così delle iniziative strategiche per migliorare i servizi di intelligence e rafforzare le istituzioni di sicurezza informatica in tutto il mondo.

Il 28 giugno del 2016, l'Alto Rappresentante per gli Affari Esteri e la Politica di Sicurezza, Federica Mogherini, presentò la Strategia globale dell'Unione Europea, che risultava essere molto

più concreta rispetto alla precedente. Gli Stati membri erano disposti a rendere l'Europa più autonoma, in modo da poter rafforzare la sua posizione nel sistema internazionale. L'autonomia strategica richiedeva un certo grado di unità interna, che era raggiungibile attraverso standard democratici e maggiori investimenti nazionali nel campo della sicurezza e della difesa. Nel quadro della Strategia globale dell'UE, i funzionari europei avevano fortemente incoraggiato una maggiore resilienza per affrontare i periodi di crisi e le difficoltà in generale e avevano promosso la cooperazione a livello nazionale e globale, nonché l'istituzione di accordi internazionali basati sulla responsabilità e sull'assistenza reciproca.

A partire dagli anni '50, Israele aveva basato la sua strategia nucleare sull'ambiguità, non avendo mai ammesso né negato di possedere le armi nucleari. Questa dottrina mirava a intimorire e a distogliere i vicini Stati arabi dall'attaccarla. Nel 1958, lo Stato ebraico iniziò a costruire un reattore nucleare e un centro di ricerca, noto come Centro di ricerca nucleare Shimon Peres Negev, vicino alla città di Dimona, chiarendo più volte che non sarebbe mai stato il primo Paese ad introdurre le armi nucleari nella regione. Sebbene Israele avesse dichiarato che il centro di Dimona era unicamente dedicato alla ricerca nel campo della scienza atomica, ancora oggi, molti esperti di sicurezza sostengono che il suo vero scopo era quello di produrre e sviluppare le armi nucleari. Lo Stato ebraico aveva anche rifiutato di firmare il Trattato di Non-proliferazione (TNP) del 1968 perché, dal suo punto di vista, non era un mezzo efficace per garantire la pace e la stabilità nella regione.

A questo proposito, Israele aveva fermamente sottolineato che, nonostante l'Iraq, la Siria e l'Iran avessero già ratificato il TNP, i loro programmi nucleari clandestini erano tuttavia in via di sviluppo. Gli Israeliani supportavano un approccio più pragmatico in materia di sicurezza regionale, basato su dialoghi diretti, e avevano espresso la loro volontà di cooperare con i vicini Paesi arabi nell'elaborazione di una strategia volta a gestire le minacce più rilevanti nella regione, tra cui il progetto nucleare iraniano e la cooperazione tra Siria e Repubblica Popolare di Corea (RPDC) in campo nucleare. Netanyahu aveva fortemente criticato l'Unione Europea per aver sottovalutato le ambizioni dell'Iran di acquisire le armi di distruzione di massa e, perciò, si prese carico della situazione mostrando all'UE i progressi dell'Iran nello sviluppo di materiali radioattivi, sulla base di rapporti ufficiali realizzati da ufficiali dell'intelligence israeliana.

Non appena l'Unione Europea si rese conto che l'Iran aveva un impianto segreto per arricchire l'uranio nella città di Qom, decise di imporre diverse sanzioni contro il Paese, che consistevano

principalmente in restrizioni al commercio internazionale, ai sistemi finanziari e al settore energetico. Tuttavia, dopo che l'Iran e i Paesi P5+1, ossia Stati Uniti, Russia, Cina, Francia, Regno Unito e Germania, firmarono il Piano d'azione congiunto nel 2013, gran parte di queste sanzioni fu revocata e l'Iran, in cambio, si impegnò ad adottare diverse misure restrittive contro il suo programma. Molti funzionari israeliani, incluso il ministro degli esteri Tzipi Livni, mostrarono poca fiducia nei confronti della presunta collaborazione dell'Iran e esortarono dunque gli Stati Uniti e l'Unione Europea ad adottare misure più coercitive contro l'Iran.

Il 14 luglio del 2015, l'Iran, l'Unione Europea i Paesi P5+1 lanciarono il Piano d'azione congiunto globale, che prevedeva sia nuove restrizioni contro il progetto nucleare del Paese arabo in cambio della sospensione di tutte le precedenti sanzioni sia l'impegno delle parti a cooperare per l'uso pacifico dell'energia nucleare. Dopo che l'Agenzia internazionale per l'energia atomica riferì che l'Iran stava sistematicamente violando le disposizioni dell'accordo, il presidente degli Stati Uniti, Donald Trump, decise di ritirarsi dal Piano d'azione congiunto globale e di imporre unilateralmente sanzioni contro l'Iran, assicurandosi il pieno appoggio di Israele. L'UE aveva criticato fermamente la decisione di Trump, considerando che avrebbe compromesso gli sforzi diplomatici nel fermare il programma nucleare iraniano.

Negli ultimi trent'anni, lo Stato ebraico e l'Unione Europea si sono impegnate in numerose joint venture e hanno sviluppato solide attività commerciali. Israele è divenuto uno dei partner chiave dell'UE, specialmente nel campo della ricerca e sviluppo (R&S), e attualmente è l'unico Paese non europeo ad essere associato al Programma quadro europeo per la ricerca e lo sviluppo tecnologico. A livello politico, tuttavia, le loro relazioni si sono rivelate molto contrastanti. Israele, da un lato, manifestava apertamente la volontà di integrarsi nel progetto europeo ma, dall'altro, aveva poca fiducia nelle politiche europee e cercava di limitare il ruolo dell'UE nei negoziati di pace con i palestinesi. L'UE, a sua volta, aveva risentito della poca considerazione che le era stata riservata e aveva fortemente criticato il modo in cui lo Stato ebraico stava affrontando la questione palestinese, considerando le sue misure militari eccessivamente sproporzionate. In conclusione, sarebbe necessario un nuovo dialogo europeo-israeliano, basato sul libero scambio di idee e opinioni, per comprendere meglio le loro diverse prospettive e gettare le basi per un rapporto geopolitico duraturo e di reciproca fiducia.