

## **NARROWING THE LEGITIMACY GAP IN EU-ISRAELI RELATIONS**

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The EU can and should contribute to reforms in countries of the Middle East and to the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. For that purpose it should rely on its economic forte and position itself as a normative power. Such a normative status presupposes, however, legitimacy, which is lacking, to a large extent, in the eyes of Israelis.

The widespread narrative that prevails in the Israeli political sphere, as well as in wide segments of the Israeli society, is that the policies of the EU and most of its Member States are simply unbalanced and anti-Israeli. Critical European approaches towards Israel are perceived as the outcome of a European surrender to vested Arab interests, as an instrument designed to clear Europe's own conscience and to create its own identity, and as a reflection of European *naïveté*, double standards and preference for preaching and declaration over deeds. This narrative adversely affects the legitimacy of the EU in Israel, and thereby making it very difficult for it to position itself as a normative power.

This paper identified and analysed numerous measures designed to redress that state of affairs. Some of these measures should contribute to changing the realities of EU-Israeli relations: the EU should enhance its internal and external persona, improve the coherence of its Common Foreign and Security Policy, ensure a larger degree of coherence and consistence of its external policies and forms of external involvement, improve its trans-Atlantic relations, and display more generosity to Israel in the trade arena. Other measures should be directed at altering Israel's perceptions of the realities on the ground: the European Union, its Member States and its citizens should embark on a deep and frank dialogue with the Israeli society, designed to reduce mutual suspicion and ignorance. Within this context the EU should do much

more than it does to facilitate mobility schemes for students and scholars. Parallel to that, the EU should launch a wide-scale, grass-root public relations campaign, aimed at improving its legitimacy in Israel.

The adoption of this panoply of measures could improve the credibility and legitimacy of the EU in the eyes of Israelis, thereby paving the way for its more constructive civil, normative contribution to the Middle East, and particularly to Israel.

The analysis presented in this paper focused on EU-Israel relations, and the various measures proposed to narrow the EU's legitimacy deficit were raised in that very context. Indeed, the State of Israel, the historical background for her creation, the Zionist movement which provided for her ideological apparatus, her socio-economic and geo-political situation, and her relations with Europe, all possess unique features, that merit distinct scholarly treatment. Yet there are many other instances of EU external involvement in an environment of lack of legitimacy. Further research is thus called upon in order to ascertain which of the findings of this paper may be applicable, *mutatis mutandis*, to other countries that face normative pressures on the part of the EU.