



Post-Holocaust and Anti-Semitism

No. 48 1 September 2006 / 8 Elul 5766

Anti-Israeli Bias in the European Parliament and Other European Union Institutions

An Interview with Rijk van Dam

- About 20 percent of the Members of the European Parliament are friends of Israel. Another 20 percent are clear friends of the Palestinian people, while the remaining 60 percent like to sit on the fence. Some of Israel's friends are outspoken; many prefer to keep a low profile.
- Since 1993, the EU and its member states have given over four billion euros of financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority and a variety of Palestinian NGOs. This was meant to develop democratic institutions as well as promote education and prosperity among Palestinians. A substantial portion of the European funding, however, has served purposes such as corruption and terrorism.
- One significant achievement of the friends of Israel in the European Parliament was a 2003 resolution that no EU money given to the Palestinians should be used, directly or indirectly, to strengthen hatred of Jews, to promote various types of racism, or to distort history.
- Another achievement was the 2005 resolution of the European Parliament stating there is abundant evidence that Hizbollah is a terrorist organization, and the European ministers should put it on the list of such organizations. This has not happened because of the opposition of three EU member states: France, Spain, and Ireland.

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(MEPs) are friends of Israel. Another 20 percent are clear friends of the Palestinian people, while the remaining 60 percent like to sit on the fence. Some of Israel's friends are outspoken; many prefer to keep a low profile."

Rijk van Dam was an MEP from 1997 to 2004. He represented the Christian Union, an association of Dutch Protestant parties. After he left the Parliament, he became on 1 October 2004 director of the European Coalition for Israel. The members of this pro-Israeli lobby are four Christian organizations: Bridges for Peace, Christians for Israel-International, Christian Friends of Israel, and the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem. In 2005, Ebenezer joined as the fifth full member.

Van Dam remarks: "The low profile of Israel's friends became very clear when several years ago we took the initiative to have the Parliament investigate the funding of the Palestinian Authority. Some twenty to twenty-five German Christian Democrats were willing to sign only if we promised not to publish their names. We were still glad to have them.

"When I told this to Wolfgang Schäuble, then leader of the Christian Democrats in the German parliament, he could hardly believe it. He said he would take up the matter with the head of his faction in the European Parliament. The Christian Democrat MEPs were members of the largest faction in the Parliament, namely, the European People's Party/European Democrats (EPP-ED), which is to the Center-Right. This is a broad, pluralistic grouping. One finds there enemies of Israel next to good friends. The MEPs who did not want their names disclosed may have had a difficult position there."

Four Billion Euro to the Palestinians

Van Dam points out that the development of this investigation process sheds much light on the European attitude toward the Middle East. He says: "Since 1993, the EU and its member states have given over four billion euros of financial assistance to the PA and various Palestinian NGOs. This was meant to develop democratic institutions as well as promote education and prosperity among Palestinians. There is no doubt that a substantial portion of the European funding has served purposes such as corruption and terrorism.

"In March 2004 in Brussels, at a meeting of the European Parliament's temporary committee on abuses in PA funding (see below), the then Palestinian finance minister Salam Fayyad was asked how this European money was spent. He replied that he did not know, not a penny was left, and much of it had gone to the

pockets of fat cats. We know that longtime Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat was misappropriating large parts of the PA's resources, and led his people to economic ruin.

"In a brochure we clarified that already well before the Oslo agreements in 1993, Western leaders knew that the PLO's income was largely derived from dubious sources. It says: 'In 1990 the British National Criminal Intelligence Service determined that the PLO's acquired wealth ranged somewhere in the order of US \$8 to \$14 billion, while its annual income stream stood at approximately \$2 billion. British intelligence noted that the PLO generated a considerable portion of its budget from extortion, pay-offs, illegal arms dealing, drug trafficking, money laundering, fraud, and other illicit means.

"In the last year of Israeli rule [1993], GDP per capita in the West Bank was \$3,500, and in Gaza, \$2,800, and it had been growing. Had that growth continued, it would have been by now approximately \$7,000, which is not that remote from what Saudi Arabia had before the meteoric increase in oil prices. It certainly would have dwarfed that of Egypt, Syria and Jordan. Before the second Palestinian uprising in September 2000, under Palestinian Authority rule, the GDP per capita had fallen to about \$1,300. Since then it has only declined further."¹

A Temporary Inquiry Committee

"It wasn't easy to get an inquiry started. In 2002 a few MEPS - Ilka Schroeder from Germany, Willy de Clerq from Belgium, Charles Tannock from Great Britain, and I - started the effort. The procedure is a difficult one. For a parliamentary inquiry, one needs the signatures of one-quarter of the MEPs, which at that time meant 154. Despite great resistance, we finally managed to get close to 180. EU external relations commissioner Chris Patten used his personal staff to try to convince MEPs to withdraw their signatures. Nine who had already signed gave in to the pressure.

"We then presented the signatures to the presidency of the European Parliament. This is composed of the presidents of the various factions and so includes a communist, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, the copresident of the Greens, a socialist, and so on. Our opponents managed to prevent a parliamentary inquiry; instead a temporary inquiry committee was established that had much less competence. It was composed of twenty-five MEPs drawn from the foreign affairs, budget, and control commissions.

"Among the committee's members were some outspoken enemies of Israel as well as friends. Most of the inquiry took place in 2003, and a little of it in 2004. The report had to be finished before the

end of the parliamentary period. Israel provided much evidence including proof of fraud found in the offices of Arafat. Thirteen committee members said: 'We haven't found sufficient proof, let's close the matter.' The other twelve concluded that much evidence of abuse had been found and stated that the matter should be investigated in more detail by the new Parliament.

"That action thus ended in failure, but the European Commission has by now become much more critical. An account has been created at the World Bank to which all monies of donors are transferred. It is claimed that nothing more is paid to the Palestinians in cash. Whether that is true or not, I cannot judge."

Hate in Palestinian Schoolbooks

"In earlier years we had already addressed another important problem: the hate promotion in Palestinian schoolbooks. Until 2000, the Palestinians claimed that they bought these from Jordan and Egypt. Yet their own new schoolbooks are not much better.

"In 2000, with a few MEPs, we started to ask the European Commission questions such as: 'What is your relationship with the Palestinian textbooks where Israel's existence is denied and horrible things are said about Jews?' Their official answer was that there was no European subsidy for Palestinian schoolbooks.

"We came back saying: 'But the EU pays for buildings and for teachers who use these books. It cannot be that you don't inspect what kind of teaching materials are used.' We demanded that the EU representative to the PA should check these books. We knew that he already had done so but had gotten a signal from Brussels to let the matter rest."

Resolution: No EU Money for Hatred

Van Dam continues: "Then we approached Commissioner Patten with questions such as: 'It cannot be that you send large amounts of money to the Palestinians who use school materials containing texts that are criminal under European laws.' Patten responded more or less: 'We have better things to do than monitoring books and such matters.'

"He also said: 'The EU does not pay for these books, you have to go to the member states who subsidize these.' Patten was right insofar as some member states indeed pay directly for the textbooks. Finland, for instance, contributes about seven million euros per year.

"We then decided on a different strategy. The European Parliament should declare that no money given to the Palestinians may be used, directly or indirectly, to strengthen hatred of Jews, to encourage various types of racism, or to distort history. Such money could only be used to promote a peaceful solution of the conflict.

"We proposed such a resolution in 2002 when the 2001 annual accounts came up for approval. We mentioned the schoolbooks in it, and some MEPs opposed this. They did not want to express an opinion on the content of schoolbooks, and the resolution was defeated. We raised it again in 2003, this time without mentioning the schoolbooks, when the accounts for 2002 came up for approval. Now the motion was adopted.

"The existing trade agreements between the EU and Israel allow for Israeli exports to enter the EU without duties. This includes products made in Israeli factories in the disputed territories. In 2002, the European Parliament discussed an initiative to suspend that treaty and boycott imports from the 'occupied' territories. Although the resolution obtained a majority, it was not within the competence of the European Parliament to decide the matter but, rather, of the European Commission.

"Subsequently, the Israeli Permanent Representation in Brussels reached an agreement with the European Commission about how this issue should be treated. As so many Palestinian workers are employed in the factories in the disputed territories, they would have been the main victims of such a boycott."

Hamas and Hizbollah

"Nowadays much of the EU financial help to the Palestinians is suspended but not stopped. Hamas, which controls the Palestinian government, is on the EU's list of terrorist groups. The EU cannot, however, reach an agreement to put Hizbollah on that list. It can still raise money in the EU.

"Although twenty-two member states have agreed to put Hizbollah on the terrorist list, the remaining three block this. Diplomats from all twenty-five member states meet in a secret clearing house to discuss the list. Yet it has leaked that the three states that oppose putting Hizbollah on it are France, Spain, and Ireland.

"We had, however, some success on this matter. The European Treaty mainly covers such issues as agriculture, transportation, and the environment. Foreign affairs are not part of the Treaty, yet the European Parliament discusses them. They remain, however, a national responsibility and also are dealt with by NATO."

Van Dam relates: "In March 2005, at a plenary meeting in Strasbourg, the issue came up. A debate in the Parliament starts with a draft resolution presented on Wednesday the week before. Usually these are very cautious. This one stated that if it should be proved that Hizbollah is a terrorist organization, then the European ministers were called upon to put them on the list.

"Afterward, every resolution is usually further diluted so as to obtain majority support. One could rightfully expect that the final text would have been even weaker. Several organizations and individuals started to lobby, the European Coalition among them. I visited all the speakers in that debate. If they were not in the office, I spoke with their assistants. I told them how incredible it is that such a double standard prevails in the EU. Democracy seems important in Europe, yet is irrelevant in the Middle East. Terror in Madrid and London is horrible, but seems of no relevance in Jerusalem or Tel Aviv."

Double Standards

"We gave the MEPs our Coalition's brochure titled "The European Union and Palestinian Terrorism: A Double Standard that Needs Revisiting." It records how EU leaders have routinely reacted to terrorist atrocities committed by Palestinians and to Israel's measured military responses in self-defense. The latter are habitually condemned as 'an excessive use of force.'

"The brochure also mentions how in April 2002, after a Palestinian suicide bomber killed twenty-nine civilians at a Passover seder meal in Netanya, Chris Patten angrily declared about Israel's reaction: 'The Israeli Defense Forces are trampling over the Geneva Convention and any notion of international law is being torn up.'²

"The unexpected happened. When on the Wednesday the following week the draft resolution was discussed, the inclination was to make it stronger. When it was brought for a vote on Thursday, the final text said there was abundant evidence that Hizbollah is a terrorist organization, and the European ministers should put it on the list. About five hundred MEPs voted in favor and fewer than ten against, all or almost all communists.

"The European Parliament was thus ahead of the countries' ministers and diplomats. Nothing has happened because the Parliament has no authority regarding who is put on the list. Yet it expressed itself very clearly on this matter."

Israel's Major Enemies

Van Dam explains that among Israel's major enemies in the European Parliament are the communist and other leftist factions, now called the European United Left-Nordic Green Left (GUE-NGL). They have 42 of the 732 MEPs.

"The Italian Louisa Morgantini was in the previous parliamentary period the chair of the parliamentary delegation to the Palestinian Authority. One can describe her as an enemy to Israel. In the previous parliament, there was one exception. Ilka Schroeder, who was elected on the Green ticket in eastern Germany, left her party and joined the GUE/NGL, was a strong supporter of Israel.

The Greens-EFA, who have forty-one MEPs as a faction, always vote against Israel, including Cohn-Bendit, who is a strong opponent. Some members such as Johannes Voggenhuber from Austria, however, are very reasonable.

"The Socialists (PES) are the second largest group with two hundred MEPs. Most support the Palestinians because they see them as a pitiable, poverty-stricken group. There are, however, other voices among them. The previous chairman of the Israel delegation, a German Social Democrat, did not share the anti-Israeli positions.

"In the previous Parliament, the French Jewish Socialist François Zimeray was very active on behalf of Israel. Perhaps because of this, his party did not include him as a candidate again in the 2004 elections. On the other hand, my colleagues and I once heard Austrian Social Democrat MEP Hannes Svoboda say in the temporary committee for funding the PA that Israel has no right to exist."

The More Supportive

"The EPP-ED with 264 MEPs is a mix of factions including conservatives as well as Christian Democrats. In this heterogeneous group, the attitude toward Israel varies from very positive to highly critical.

"The Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) are the third largest grouping with ninety seats. Some of its factions give little support to Israel, particularly the British Liberal Democrats. In the previous Parliament, a representative of the Dutch D66 party, Louisewies van der Laan, was especially anti-Israeli. I considered her hardly better than Morgantini.

"Once she came back from the PA and showed a picture of

quadruplets born in one of the hospitals there. I said I hoped that when they were adults, they would only pick up stones to build houses and not to throw at others. Now van der Laan is head of the D66 faction in the Second Chamber of the Dutch parliament, and may even become the party leader.

"There are also some smaller groups. One is Independence and Democracy (IND/DEM) with thirty-three MEPs. This includes the British members of the UKIP party who are only interested in having Great Britain withdraw from the EU. My colleagues and I were members of that group and many of its MEPs were supportive of Israel.

"The last group is Union for Europe of the Nations with thirty MEPs. It, too, is very heterogeneous. It includes the Irish Fianna Gael, hostile to Israel, and others such as the Portuguese delegates of the Partido Popular, who are very supportive. It also includes the extreme right-wing Populist Party from Denmark, which is generally dangerous including for Israel.

"There are also about thirty-two independent MEPs among whom is Jean-Marie Le Pen, the French right-wing extremist. He is now a member of the Parliament's Israel delegation."

Progress in the Commission

"The European Union and the Commission seem to think that evenhandedness in the Middle East is the best principle. They make statements about what Israel and the Palestinians should do and give the impression that the two are comparable entities. On the one side is Israel, a democratic state with an advanced legal system; on the other is an artificial nation of Palestine, with hardly any structure. IDF retaliations are regularly condemned in Brussels and Strasbourg without mentioning the Palestinian terror that leads to them.

"As far as the present Commission is concerned, there is progress from Israel's point of view. Patten has been replaced as commissioner for international relations by Benita Ferrero-Waldner, the conservative former Austrian foreign minister. She tries hard to ensure that no EU money goes directly to Hamas. The Commission's vice-president Franco Frattini of Forza Italia, Berlusconi's party, who is responsible for human rights among other matters, is a very positive figure as well.

"Yet it would be mistaken for Israel to assess only the Parliament and the Commission. Another very important figure in the EU is Javier Solana, its representative for foreign affairs. He tries to play the role of the EU's foreign minister even though, since there is no unified European foreign policy, there cannot be such an official.

Solana is a good friend of the Palestinians and constantly tries to find new openings for Hamas."

Visiting the National Parliaments

"One way to influence positions is to visit the national parliaments. The parliamentarians often do not know that they can invite their ministers to explain the positions they are going to espouse in Brussels. They can also call their national MEPs for a discussion.

"When I go to a European capital, I always do so with representatives of our member organizations. I also discuss matters with the Israeli ambassador and with the Jewish community.

"Ireland is the one country we visited where the attitude toward Israel is particularly hostile. I once went to see some members of the foreign affairs committee, including the vice-chairman. He said something like, 'Christians supporting Israel. Yes, I remember Godfried of Bouillon and his Crusaders, who were already mass murderers in Palestine.' He meant that as Christians, we had no right to speak. In the eyes of many in Ireland, the Palestinians are waging the same battle against Israel as the Catholics in Northern Ireland against the Protestants.

"One of the claims frequently made by hostile counterparts is that they are anti-Zionists and not anti-Semites. They usually use arguments, however, identical to those of anti-Semites."

The World Council of Churches

"Although the EU and its institutions are our main lobbying objectives, we sometimes go beyond them. In mid-2005, we visited the World Council of Churches in Geneva after this organization had called for divestment from Israel. This got much attention at the time, though later the opposition increased. At the WCC's headquarters, we were received by a Swedish and a Pakistani pastor.

"In the first part of the meeting, they simply denied that this call was the official view of the WCC. They claimed that, instead, it was a motion by the temporary committee for the annual conference, which had only been adopted in that committee.

"We said: 'So there is no call. Have you placed on your website a correction that it has been canceled?' They answered: 'No. The motion is still there, but it is not an official document.' So we said

we understood that there was still a call for divestment.

"Then we asked them: 'Why doesn't the WCC condemn what goes on in Darfur, or in North Korea?' They replied: 'In Africa and Asia we have member churches. They will object if we take a stand on their countries. In Israel we do not have influential churches.' We told them our conclusion: 'What you in fact say is that you take a one-sided, biased action against Israel because you get no protest.' They had no choice but to admit that. In May 2006, the WCC Executive condemned Israel in a very one-sided way and with this confirmed its anti-Israeli posture."

Why Do Christians Stand Up for Israel?

"The member organizations of the European Coalition have been supporting Israel and the Jewish people for over twenty years. Not long ago we realized that we lacked a voice in politics, and this led to the Coalition's establishment.

"The representatives came to see me in 2003 and asked me to explain why the EU has such a negative attitude toward Israel. In my view this is directly related to secularization. There was a so-called 'ethical revolution' in Europe, mainly from the 1970s onward. People left churches and their ethical values. This brought with it a lack of a coherent civilization, in which anti-Semitism could rear its head again.

"Many churches took a horizontal approach, claiming that only interhuman relations were important while neglecting the relationship between man and God. They thus followed the general fashion of lack of values and respect. This also explains why among the leaders of so-called 'progressive' churches in the United States there are many proponents of anti-Israeli measures. These people claim that the weakest party is the one that is always right. They do not want to see that there can be extreme criminality among the weak. The many Palestinians whose national aim is to destroy others are a typical example.

"When I left the European Parliament, I was asked to represent the European Coalition for Israel within the EU and its institutions. From a technical standpoint, I have the advantage that as a former MEP I have free entrance to the European Parliament. There is also an office available especially for former MEPs, which I can use."

Standing Up for Israel

"My colleagues and I are often asked why we stand up for Israel. As Bible-believing Christians, we think the Scriptures are very clear about the covenant the Lord made with the People of Israel. Through Israel we are crafted into that covenant.

"Thus we fight against the lie of replacement theology that says the Christians of the world have replaced the Jews in that covenant. For us, standing with Israel and the Jewish people is standing with one's eldest brother. One can sometimes have disagreements with one's brothers and sisters, but when they are threatened, you always support them. I am grateful to say that in recent years there is more and more response from the Israeli side.

"I am often asked whether I do this because in some way I have a remote Jewish family background. I explain that I have none. So people ask me: 'What is in it for you and your colleagues?' I answer that the only thing in it for us is the Lord's blessing, which says in the Scriptures: 'Who blesses you [Israel] will be blessed.' That is the sole reason why we struggle side by side against the evil forces that threaten the Jewish people."

Interviewed by Manfred Gerstenfeld

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This text is part of a major project of interviews with prominent Dutch people on Dutch attitudes toward Jews and Israel. This project was funded by The Israel Maror Foundation.

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Notes

1. "European Funding of Palestinian Institutions," Issue Brief, European Coalition for Israel, www.europeancoalitionforisrael.org
2. "The European Union and Palestinian Terrorism: A Double Standard that Needs Revisiting," Issue Brief, European Coalition for Israel, www.europeancoalitionforisrael.org.

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Dore Gold and Manfred Gerstenfeld, Co-Publishers. Joel Fishman, Editor. Chaya Herskovic, Associate Editor. Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 13 Tel-Hai St., Jerusalem, Israel; Tel. 972-2-561-9281, Fax. 972-2-561-9112, Email: jcpa@netvision.net.il. In U.S.A.: Center for Jewish Community Studies, 1616 Walnut St., Suite 1005, Philadelphia, PA 19103-5313; Tel. (215) 772-0564, Fax. (215) 772-0566. © Copyright. All rights reserved. ISSN: 1565-3676.

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