

Europe is in the midst of a revolution and Israel must chart a new path

ELNET works via parliamentary delegations and strategic dialogues to strengthen cooperation between Israel and European countries – especially given the geopolitical changes due to the war in Ukraine.

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‘Europe is undergoing a transformation,’ says the incoming CEO of [ELNET Israel](#), Dr. Emanuel Navon. “The war in Ukraine marks the end of a historic era in Europe, and Israel must be ready to change its perception of European countries.”

[ELNET](#) was founded 15 years ago, in order to strengthen ties and cooperation between Israel and Europe. The ELNET Israel office coordinates the organization’s activities and manages delegations and dialogues with senior politicians, parliamentarians, diplomats, public figures and European business leaders, in cooperation with ELNET’s offices in Europe and the Friends of ELNET in the US.

“Europe’s security and energy needs changed dramatically following the Russian invasion,” says Navon, explaining the importance of hosting European delegations that come to Israel. “The German chancellor called it a *Zeitenwende* or ‘historical turning point.’ Europe is ready to turn over a new leaf with Israel, which has become a key military, intelligence, energy, and technology partner. But for that to happen, here in Israel, we need to be more proactive.”

In his latest book, *The Star and the Scepter – A Diplomatic History of Israel* (Jewish Publication Society and University of Nebraska Press, 2020), Dr. Navon devotes one of the chapters to the European issue. ELNET Israel’s goal is to help Israel take advantage of these changes, through the connections and meetings that the organization maintains.

“Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, Europe has experienced a significant energy crisis,” he points out. “There is a desire to reduce dependence on oil and on Russian natural gas in particular, and this requires the European countries to diversify imports by using natural gas from Israel.

“In addition, Europe knows that if it wants to move forward, it must develop renewable energy, and this is where Israel enters the picture as a leader in research and development.

The Jewish state must consider Europe’s political and strategic changes

“If you had told a German citizen two years ago that today there would be German tanks in Ukraine fighting Russia, he would have said you were out of your mind. Putin fundamentally changed Europe, not only because his actions brought German and American tanks into Ukraine, but because they led to the expansion of NATO’s borders, first with Finland and soon with Sweden joining the organization.

“In addition, Germany recently published a new security strategy – something that has not been done in 50 years – in which it was decided to increase defense spending. This is a new Europe, and our perception of it needs to be updated.”

An outdated concept

Dr. Navon, a lecturer in international relations at Tel Aviv University and a senior fellow at the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security (JISS), says that Israel must consider the political and strategic changes taking place in Europe. “Until a few years ago, the perception in Israel was that ties with Eastern European countries needed to be strengthened in order to neutralize the rest of Europe,” he explains. “This perception needs an update. Today, there are almost no countries in Europe that do not need Israel’s added value in security and technology. It is precisely the countries that were supposedly useful to us, such as Hungary, that are now acting on behalf of Russian interests.

“We must remember that the large navies operating in the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf against Iran are those of the United States, France, and the UK. On the other hand, Hungary vetoed Sweden’s accession to NATO, while at the same time working to reduce sanctions against Russia. The gap between the

Israeli and Russian interests is vast, and we have seen evidence of this in the cooperation between Moscow and Tehran.”

Navon explains that in today’s Europe, there are two exceptional countries that are on a collision course with the European Union. As it happens, these two countries, Hungary and Poland, share the political and social debates over judicial reforms with Israel.

“The executive branch has taken over the judiciary in these two countries,” he says, adding that internal sanctions are being applied against Hungary within the EU. “We recently brought a parliamentary delegation from Poland to Israel,” he recalls, “it was a two-party delegation, so there were diverse opinions about what was happening here in Israel. In general, they were very interested to know about the reforms because they have a similar disagreement.”

Dr. Navon adds that while ELNET is an apolitical organization, it does try to explain the debate in Israel regarding the constitutional controversy. “There is no doubt that the composition of the current government, alongside the protests over the constitutional question, does not make our activity abroad easier.

“So far, we have not encountered refusal by parliamentarians to come because of the composition of the coalition, but there is a demand among the delegations to bring speakers to explain the dispute in Israel.

“Moreover, the widespread mobilization of civil society in Israel in recent months has impressed European opinion-makers. What they see is a strong civil society that has not allowed the passage of radical constitutional changes without broad consensus, something which did take place in countries such as Hungary and Poland.”

Strategic Dialogues

ELNET’s activity in Europe significantly helps strengthen ties with Israel and is responsible for a number of profitable collaborations and defense agreements, such as Germany’s acquisition of the Arrow 3. “We are a pro-Israel network, like AIPAC for Europe if you like. We have offices in London, Paris, Berlin, Brussels, and Warsaw,” says Dr. Navon. “Our two main activities to advance relations between Europe and Israel are bringing parliamentary delegations to Israel and hosting strategic dialogues between European and Israeli decision-makers.

“Our actions are carried out in full cooperation with the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Foreign Ministry lacks the resources

to finance such activities, as it deals more with ministerial policy delegations. We deal with parliamentary delegations.”

Navon explains that a significant part of the funding for the organization’s activities comes from American donors through the New York branch, who understand the importance of holding these types of events. In addition, the European offices provide donations received through local fundraising. “We are a nonprofit organization funded by private philanthropy, and our donors care about strengthening the ties between Israel and Europe.”

The organization's activities make a significant impact, he adds. “In the past, 80% of members of the US Congress visited Israel, while in Europe, it was less than 20%. When we bring in European parliament members, we see how impressed they are by Israel’s security challenges and by its technological solutions to European challenges. The impact is powerful, and it changes their perception on a variety of issues.”

Navon gives several examples, one of which is a strategic dialogue with Romania. “The Romanians discovered gas fields in the Black Sea, and they want to protect them from possible Russian attacks,” he explains, “They decided to turn to Israeli security companies, something that would not have happened without the strategic Israel-Romania dialogue organized by ELNET.

“ELNET also played a central role in the purchase of the Arrow 3 by Germany,” adds Dr. Navon, “Even before the fighting in Ukraine, a delegation from the German parliament, which included the chairman of their security committee, visited Rafael Advanced Defense Systems and Israeli Aircraft Industries, where the process of protecting German airspace began, an issue that today is most relevant because of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Had it not been for this visit, it is reasonable to assume they would have gone to the United States first.”

Despite its focus on Europe, Navon says that the organization began integrating Arab countries after the signing of the Abraham Accords in 2020 between Israel and a number of Arab countries. “We are not losing focus on Europe, but we are taking advantage of this normalization to the benefit of relations between Israel and Europe. The intention is to show Europeans how partnerships between Israel and countries like Morocco or the UAE can provide solutions to European problems, such as energy and food security. We must not forget that while Israel exports natural gas to Europe,

it does so through liquefaction stations in Egypt, which goes to show that cooperation between Israel and Arab countries can benefit Europe.

“Europe is undergoing significant changes, and we in Israel need to be more proactive,” concludes Dr. Navon, “such as with Germany, which suffers from a lack of innovation and technologies. Or the UK, which needs digitization and innovation in the healthcare system. Such countries, and many others in Europe, are now looking to work with Israel.”

This article was written in cooperation with ELNET.

Translated by Alan Rosenbaum.