

## Disdainful European Views of Israel

By Kenneth W. Stein

(Paris) — Israel has few friends in Europe. In the months ahead, Europe's collective adversarial relationship toward Israel is likely to worsen.

It is not clear whether anti-Israeli attitudes or pro-Palestinian feelings are European intellectual covers for deeply held anti-Semitic sentiments.

Jews in Europe have little influence on public and governmental attitudes toward Israel. In numbers, Jews are either too small or lack leadership. They certainly are absent a trans-European Jewish lobbying organization; there is no AIPAC equivalent in Europe which promotes Israeli interests to politicians, parliaments, and the media. With few exceptions, the print and electronic media are regularly cold if not disdainful of Israeli policies.

By and large, European foreign ministries and civil servants who deal with the Middle East consider Israel responsible for the stalemate in Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. A member of the Belgium foreign ministry defined Israel as a "historic mistake" and Sharon's electoral victory as "disastrous." But his views were at the extreme end of an anti-Israeli sentiment spectrum.

With an American administration unwilling to be actively engaged in Arab-Israeli diplomacy at present, most individual European foreign ministries and European Union policy-makers are eager to play a more active role in Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. Finally, European decision-makers portray American administration and congressional support for Israel, regardless of party configurations in Washington as

obstacles in the way of Israeli concessions.

These and other conclusions emerged from meetings with Middle Eastern specialists in Europe. Public seminars, private talks, and candid interviews that focused on American foreign policy and the Middle East predominated two weeks of exchanges in Hamburg, Berlin, Munich, Brussels, Milan, Bari, and Paris. Organized by American cultural attaches as part of public affairs out-reach programming, this trip resulted in extraordinarily frank discussions with high ranking civil servants, diplomats, academics, business people, and journalists.

Proximity to the Middle East has always shaped European attitudes toward the region. With a long imperial presence in North Africa and the Middle East, slavishly dependent upon the region's oil and natural gas, and susceptible to labor migrations from an exploding labor supply, Europeans preach Middle Eastern stability, and, therefore, a negotiated Arab-Israeli agreement. Already inundated by foreign workers, there is fear of being overwhelmed by immigrants from Eastern Europe, Turkey, North Africa, and the Middle East.

However, Israel, to most Europeans, is almost exclusively blame-worthy for the impasse in Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. Israel is Goliath facing the Palestinian David; Israel has power and the Palestinians are economically weak. Israel is an occupying force and Europeans dislike countries that occupy other countries. Israel's thirty-year presence and policies in the West Bank and Gaza are blamed for the

absence of institutional and organizational development in the emerging Palestinian state.

European audiences were distinctly uncomfortable with my caustic reminder that France and England dominated the Middle East for centuries and did little to educate local Arabs or develop economic infrastructures. When reminded that Jordan and Egypt were stewards of the West Bank and Gaza from 1949 to 1967, I drew blank stares. History for foreign ministry bureaucrats who deal with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict begins after the June 1967 war.

Among Europeans who deal with the Arab-Israeli conflict, naiveté is mixed with realism. For some younger German foreign ministry bureaucrats, the belief persists that they, unlike an older generation who may still be muzzled by Germany's historic connection to Jewish history. They feel that they are not subject to the same constraints about criticizing Israeli policies today.

Individual foreign ministries and politicians in the European Union (the 15 member states) believe Europe can and should play a more active role in Arab-Israeli diplomacy than in years past. Few avoid criticism of Dennis Ross's exclusive handling of Arab-Israeli negotiations over the last dozen years. The Belgian foreign minister who rotates to the presidency of the EU in July is already anticipating a more active European role in Middle Eastern matters. This is likely to be a nuisance to Israel. Meanwhile, a tiny few seasoned European bureaucrats who understand the complexities and uncertainties of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations are

by no means joyful about jumping into the diplomacy. In the months ahead, one can expect European economic and trade restrictions against Israeli goods and products to be implemented as response to Israeli actions taken or not taken in the territories.

Given European attitudes toward Israel and the absence of an effective Israeli lobbying voice in Europe, it can be expected that Israel will want to keep the center of political activity vis-à-vis Arab-Israeli diplomacy in Washington. For opposite reasons, expect the Palestinians and Arab states to urge a greater European role in Arab-Israeli diplomacy. ☆

Dr. Kenneth W. Stein is the author of "Heroic Diplomacy: Sadat, Kissinger, Carter, Begin and the Quest for Arab-Israeli Peace," Routledge, 1999. He teaches Middle Eastern history and Political Science at Emory University.

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### The View from Israel

## A Major Enterprise - But Little Known

By Carl Alpert

HAIFA - Expressions of support for Israel from Christian church groups are frequently looked upon with suspicion by many Jews in the belief that the former are intent only on ultimate conversion of all Jews to Christianity. "Ultimate" can be a long time, and may apply equally to the Orthodox Jewish belief in complete ingathering of all the exiles and the coming of the Messiah.

In the meantime, some millions of Christians are becoming increasingly vociferous and generous in their support of Israel and Jewish causes in the genuine belief that by so doing they are fulfilling God's will. Had He not promised the land of Israel to the Jewish people?

Of the several Christian groups active in this area, the largest is to be found among the so-called evangelicals who, according to Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, constitute about one third of American Christians.

About a decade and a half ago, Rabbi Eckstein, an Orthodox graduate of Yeshiva University, became engaged in a dialogue/controversy with a clergyman who had declared from the pulpit that God did not hear the prayers of the Jews. The result of that confrontation was the establishment of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews that has steered clear of all political views and has devoted itself to practical activity. The result has been the raising of millions of dollars for specific projects such as the financing of aliyah from the

former Soviet Union, integration of the immigrants in Israel, special aid to Ethiopians in Israel, philanthropic aid to elderly Jews remaining in Russia, and more. Last year alone more than \$10 million was made available for these projects.

In view of present circumstances, effort is also now being directed to encouraging and organizing Christian tourism to the Holy Land.

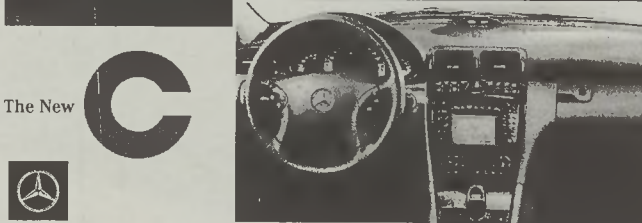
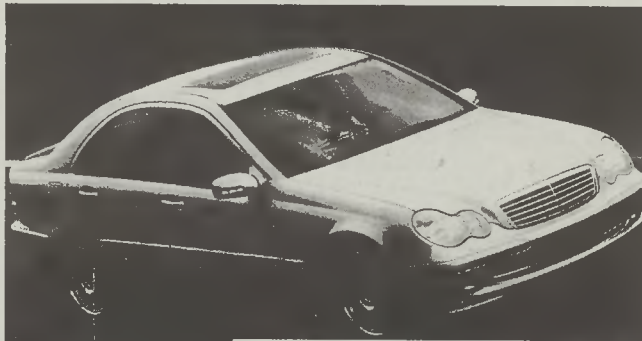
Initially the Fellowship had done some work in promoting good will on the American scene, but this has now been discontinued in favor of the provision of help to Israel and Jews in need of aid elsewhere. The results are evident. Over \$35 million have been given to The Jewish Agency for its aliyah and Klita programs. Sen. Joseph Lieberman has said that the work of the IFPJ has been one of the best-kept secrets in Jewish life.

The fund raising is quite different from the methods employed by the Jewish community. Contributions are received in direct response to television, radio and direct mail appeals in which the message is based on literal belief in Biblical stories and prophecies. There are no dinners or periodic campaigns. The program continues all year round, and the office of the International Fellowship receives from 1500 to 2000 letters a day, many with contributions on a monthly basis.

Administrative costs of this program come to only 3.7%, Rabbi Eckstein told me, but he is not proud of the low figure. He felt they should spend more on promotion, which would be productive.

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