



The 2014
European Elections

A Jewish Manifesto



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The Board of Deputies of British Jews is the voice of British Jewry - the only organisation based on cross-communal, democratic, grassroots representation. It is the first port of call for Government, media and others seeking to understand the Jewish community's interests and concerns.

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Introduction

The 2014 European Parliament Election will take place on 22 May 2014 in the United Kingdom.

These elections matter. The EU makes up to 50% of laws enacted in the UK and controls an annual budget of around €150 billion (or £125 billion).

This manifesto is aimed at informing existing and prospective Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) about Jewish interests and concerns. The Board of Deputies hopes that the manifesto will empower our elected representatives to understand and champion these causes. Some of these are live topics, whereas others are matters that could potentially arise. In each section, the manifesto outlines in bold the commitments that the Board of Deputies would like to see from MEPs, summarised below.

Executive Summary: Key Jewish Aspirations in Europe

We ask our MEPs and prospective MEPs to commit to the following:

1. Religious Freedom

- MEPs should defend religious freedom in the European Union and around the World.
- MEPs should promote a culture of respect for diversity, including reasonable accommodation of individuals' rights to wear religious symbols and observe religious festivals and the Jewish Sabbath.
- MEPs should defend the right of Jews to practice Shechita (religious slaughter of animals for food.)
- MEPs should not stigmatise religious or other minorities through labelling. If it is genuinely consumer choice that is desired, all methods of slaughter should be labelled.
- MEPs should defend the right of Jews to practice circumcision.
- MEPs should advance the cause of human rights across the World.
- MEPs should support the EU and Member States in recognising the diversity of different denominations within Judaism, drawing on expert advice where necessary.

2. Extremism, Racism & Antisemitism in Europe

- MEPs should be alert to extremism, racism and antisemitism in Europe.
- MEPs should support coordination between member states to prevent and prosecute hate crimes and acts of terrorism.
- MEPs should act on the concerning findings from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) report, including unreservedly condemning antisemitism in all its forms and challenging member states who do not address and monitor antisemitism.
- MEPs should look to secure adequate assistance and funding to European institutions such as the EU's FRA, ensuring that it is able to conduct its survey of Jewish experiences and perceptions of antisemitism in the EU every five years as planned.
- MEPs should be particularly wary of the risk of increased antisemitism at times of heightened conflict in the Middle East.
- MEPs should be alive to hate as expressed on new social media.

- MEPs should help to ensure that assistance is provided to third-party reporting bodies and security agencies that monitor and protect vulnerable groups, including the Jewish community.
- MEPs should support initiatives which promote dialogue and understanding between different groups in society, to prevent tensions and promote cooperation.

3. Post-Holocaust Issues

- MEPs should lend their support to Holocaust education, remembrance and research.
- MEPs and prospective MEPs should take the time to show solidarity with all the victims of Nazi persecution, including Jews, Roma, homosexuals, disabled people and political opponents of Nazism.
- MEPs should use the moral authority of their position to call for a just and speedy conclusion to the issue of restitution across Europe and to press the institutions of the European Union to do the same.
- MEPs should challenge their European colleagues on those narratives that seek to minimise or downplay the Holocaust.
- MEPs should support initiatives to find unmarked graves, including helping to unlock EU-funding and working with MEP colleagues from other countries to overcome some of the bureaucratic and political obstacles to this work.

4. EU-Israel Relations

- MEPs should promote peace, security, prosperity and equality for Israel and its neighbours.
- MEPs should mobilise EU structures to promote Middle East peace at both the leadership level and at the grassroots.
- MEPs should oppose boycotts of Israel, which are divisive and promote a negative incentive structure that militates against peace.
- MEPs should be aware of the uniquely complicated threats to Israel's security, and should encourage EU institutions to take account of these threats.
- MEPs should raise concerns about Iran's nuclear programme, its financing of international terror and its human rights record with the the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.
- MEPs should act to proscribe Hezbollah in its entirety, damaging its abilities to launch attacks in Europe, the Middle East and around the World.
- MEPs should refuse to meet with Hamas politicians, officials or supporters, until the movement recognises Israel; agrees to abide by previous agreements; and desists from terrorist attacks.
- MEPs should support and nurture the growing trade between Israel and the European Union.
- MEPs should be constructive partners in the pursuit of greater integration and equality in Israel by offering financial and political support to initiatives aimed at Arab-Jewish coexistence, and helping to support projects that empower and advance the position of Arab citizens within Israeli society.
- MEPs should call on the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to ensure that international institutions such as the UNHRC act with integrity and do not disproportionately focus on Israel.

1. Religious Freedom:

Under Article 18 of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) each person has the right “to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.”

A key aspect of the manifestation of a person’s religious observance may include religious acts, specific customs and commandments, the use of ritual objects, the displays of symbols, and the observance of religious festivals and the Jewish Sabbath.

Commitment: MEPs should defend religious freedom in the European Union and around the World.

1.1 Religious Observance in the Workplace and Public Sphere:

Wearing of religious clothing and symbols are an important expression of identity and connection to a religious faith. Examples in the Jewish community might include head-coverings (including the *kippah* (skull-cap), *tzitzit* (fringes on garments), or jewellery (such as necklaces) which manifest religio-cultural imagery like the Star of David.

Many other faith communities have similar dress requirements. Wherever there is not some compelling reason – such as the infringement of the rights of others, or some demonstrable safety hazard – it is important that people of different faiths be allowed to manifest their beliefs. The accommodation of – and respect for – difference should be a fundamental facet of the European Union, bringing as it does different nations and cultures together.

The right to freedom of religious expression was underscored by the January 2013 ruling of the European Court of Human Rights in the Eweida vs. the United Kingdom case. Ms Eweida was placed on unpaid leave by British Airways when she refused to remove or cover a crucifix-necklace marking her Christian faith. The Court ruled against the UK on the basis that its laws had not provided sufficient domestic law to protect the rights of Nadia Eweida.

Commitment: MEPs should promote a culture of respect for diversity, including reasonable accommodation of individuals’ rights to wear religious symbols and observe religious festivals and the Jewish Sabbath.

1.2 Shechita – Religious Slaughter of Animals for Food:

Shechita is the Jewish religious method of slaughtering animals for food. As observant Jews can only eat meat slaughtered by the Shechita method, the practice is a key aspect to the daily life of Jews.

Shechita is a process that is based on biblical commandments given to the Jewish people, which forbid cruelty to animals. For example, Jewish law prohibits killing animals for sport.

Jewish law does permit the slaughter of animals for food, but makes the slaughter subject to stringent religious regulations. The premise of the religious laws is to ensure that the animal has a swift death with as little pain as possible. Any individual slaughter that does not meet the high standards demanded will render an animal non-Kosher, and prohibited to observant Jews.

The Shechita method is conducted by a specifically trained professional known as a Shochet (plural: shochetim), who is learned in laws of Shechita, pathology and animal anatomy. In the UK the

Shochet is regulated by the 'Rabbinical Commission for the Licensing of Shochetim' and must hold a photocard license from the Food Standards Agency.

There are occasionally moves in some European countries to limit or ban religious slaughter. We ask MEPs to be vigilant to such moves and help the Jewish community to build bridges with the relevant authorities to foster understanding about this key facet of Jewish life.

A key issue facing the Jewish community in Europe is the campaign to label Shechita products. This campaign is run under the guise of consumer choice; however, it is unclear as to why Shechita and Halal meat is being singled out, especially as pre-stunning (that Shechita forbids), frequently has painful complications for animals, with estimates that around 10% of animals are mis-stunned.

Some MEPs support labelling because they genuinely want to allow consumer choice. We would expect them to argue that all methods of animal slaughter should be labelled, rather than just singling out, and thus stigmatising, the practices of religious minorities.

Commitment: MEPs should defend the right of Jews to practice Shechita (religious slaughter of animals for food).

Commitment: MEPs should not stigmatise religious or other minorities through labelling. If it is genuinely consumer choice that is desired, all methods of slaughter should be labelled.

For further information on Shechita, please see the website of Shechita UK: www.shechitauk.org

1.3 Brit Milah – Circumcision:

Brit Milah is the Hebrew term used to describe the religious circumcision of boys at eight days old, in accordance with Jewish law.

The source for circumcising boys at eight days old is the commandment in the Torah (Gen. 17:10-14 and Lev. 12:3.) It is done as a physical sign of Jewish identity and is probably the most widely observed of all Jewish practices. As well as being a religious requirement, it is one of the most important and indeed celebrated elements of Jewish culture.

In the UK, Brit Milah is carried out most frequently by a highly-trained qualified 'Mohel,' who has undertaken both religious and practical instruction. The regulatory bodies for UK mohalim are the Initiation Society (Orthodox communities) and the Association of Reform and Liberal mohalim (Progressive communities.) These organisations are responsible for training, audit and appraisal, and insurance.

It is against Jewish law to perform a Brit Milah if the procedure could pose a danger to the child. To ensure the wellbeing of the child, circumcision is always postponed if necessary for medical reasons.

Brit Milah forms a vital part of the identity of a Jewish male. Article 8 and Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights are of particular relevance. Article 8 focuses on the protection of private and family life, and for a Jewish male circumcision is a key aspect of being part of the Jewish community. Article 9 provides a right to freedom of thought, conscience or religion. Male circumcision is a crucial requisite to being a member of the Jewish faith and it is a right that must be safeguarded.

It is essential that all MEPs are aware that Brit Milah is distinct from Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) which the Jewish faith strongly opposes. FGM is purposefully designed to restrict sexual enjoyment and is notoriously conducted through unsafe procedures. Brit Milah is in stark contrast to this purpose and process. It is a minor procedure that has no negative impact on the child or on the rest of his life. Moreover, as explained above, it is carried out in the safest possible environment.

Commitment: MEPs should defend the right of Jews to practice circumcision.

For further information, please see the website of Milah UK: www.milahuk.org

1.4 Human Rights

Human Rights are a central tenet of the Jewish faith. From the Bible onwards numerous texts speak about the importance of caring for others and upholding their rights. Genesis 1:27 tells us that all people are created 'in the image of God'. If all humans are created in the 'image of God', it follows that all human beings have an equal, innate dignity which must be respected.

Human Rights abuses continue to occur throughout Europe and around the world, and the Jewish community urges the EU to continue address these issues. The role of Jewish thinkers, shaped by biblical ethics and the experiences of the Jewish people, has been crucial to the development of human rights. Indeed, René Cassin, one of the principal authors of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was openly and profoundly influenced by the ethical framework of his Jewish background, as well as the recent experience of the Holocaust by Jews and others. A UK Jewish NGO, called René Cassin, is one organisation that continues to articulate Jewish human rights concerns.

The Jewish community applauds the EU for the acts it has taken to promote and protect human rights. We urge the EU to continue to strive to protect human rights both within and outside of its borders.

To give a few examples of human rights issues that particularly concern Jews:

- Jews and Roma were persecuted together during the Second World War, and continue to face abuse from extremists, especially in Hungary. Victimisation of the Roma needs to be tackled urgently.
- Jewish people have been forced to seek refuge from persecution multiple times throughout history, and therefore have a special interest in promoting and protecting the human rights of asylum seekers. Governments must adhere to their international obligations towards this vulnerable minority.
- Every year, Jews across the World commemorate the experience of slavery through the festival of Passover. However, tragically, slavery is not consigned to the past. Modern slavery, including human trafficking, continues and must be stopped.
- Human rights abuses in conflict situations, such as are ongoing in Syria and Sudan, are a matter of serious concern. These must be monitored and stopped.

Commitment: MEPs should advance the cause of human rights across the World.

For further information on René Cassin and its projects, please see: www.renecassin.org

1.5 Diversity in Jewish Communities

Judaism has never been monolithic, and the Jewish community takes pride in its diversity. Members of the community range from the strictly observant to the completely secular, with seemingly a group or religious denomination for everybody in between. The Board of Deputies of British Jews represents the full spectrum of UK Jews.

The diversity within the Jewish community can make it difficult for governments, politicians and institutions to navigate. This issue is more acute in states which have a system of 'church tax' – whereby a proportion of citizens' dues goes to the religious organisation of their choice.

It can be problematic where governments are faced with the difficult task of identifying the Jewish movements to recognise (or not) officially. This can have an adverse effect on sections of the community should their movement be deemed unrecognised.

One recent decision, where the Hungarian Government withdrew official recognition from the country's Progressive Jewish community, has been subject to challenge in the European Court of Human Rights, together with similarly affected minority groups from other faiths. Comparable issues have arisen in Germany in the past.

We would recommend that the Jewish umbrella bodies which do not favour a particular denomination are consulted to determine authentic movements within Judaism. As a multi-denominational umbrella-body, The Board of Deputies is well placed to advise on this issue.

Commitment: MEPs should support the EU and Member States in recognising the diversity of different denominations within Judaism, drawing on expert advice where necessary.



2. Extremism, Racism & Antisemitism in Europe

2.1 Extremism & Racism in Europe

We are very concerned about the rise of extremist movements and political parties in Europe, particularly in Hungary, Greece, France and Sweden. The motivations behind these groups vary, and include concerns about immigration, diversity and international conflicts – including the Israel-Palestine conflict – but manifest themselves in a variety of forms including hate speech, racist abuse, vandalism and violence.

Jews are not the only targets of these attacks and our concerns extend to some of the wider trends. Muslims have been the particular focus of some of the far-right groups in Western Europe and Scandinavia, whilst Roma have been a major target for the far-right in Eastern and Central Europe. Immigrants of all backgrounds are often singled out by such groups. Similarly, Islamist extremism poses a threat to much of European society, with the threat of Al-Qaeda style terrorism of concern in many countries, especially in Western Europe.

Commitment: MEPs should be alert to extremism, racism and antisemitism in Europe.

Commitment: MEPs should support coordination between member states to prevent and prosecute hate crimes and acts of terrorism.

2.2 Antisemitism in Europe

In November 2013, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) published the results of its survey of Jewish experiences and perceptions of antisemitism in the EU.

The results were disturbing. Across Europe, 66% of Jews surveyed felt antisemitism was a “very big” or “fairly big” problem in their respective countries. 76% believed that the situation had worsened over the past five years. In the year preceding the survey, 26% of respondents reported experiencing one or more incidents of antisemitic verbal abuse or threatening behaviour. 27% of respondents said that they avoided certain areas in their neighbourhoods because they didn’t feel safe there, while 38% often avoided wearing or publicly displaying symbols that might identify them as Jews. 33% feared that they may become a victim of physical assault over the next 12 months.

Respondents identified four main sources of hostility. The two largest identifiable groups were people with a ‘left-wing political view’ and people with a ‘Muslim extremist view.’ In Belgium, France, Sweden and the UK, these groups were almost twice as common as the next largest group, people with a ‘right-wing political view,’ although this was the source of most hostility in Hungary and Latvia. People with a ‘Christian extremist view’ accounted for a large proportion of incidents in Italy, Hungary and France.

The factsheet accompanying the results of the FRA survey pithily summarised, “As FRA collected data for this survey, antisemitic incidents took place in all of the EU Member States surveyed. The Jewish community in Hungary was targeted in a number of violent incidents. In Malmö, Sweden, a series of attacks culminated in the bombing of a Jewish community centre. In March 2012 the tragic murders at a Jewish day school in Toulouse, France, shocked public opinion.”

The FRA has said that it hopes to produce a report every five years, which will give European governments and authorities reliable and comparable data. However, there is concern that there may not be sufficient funding for this, which would be of concern.

Commitment: MEPs should act on the concerning findings from the FRA report, including unreservedly condemning antisemitism in all its forms and challenging member states who do not address and monitor antisemitism.

Commitment: MEPs should look to secure adequate assistance and funding to European institutions such as the EU’s Fundamental Rights Agency, ensuring that it is able conduct its survey of Jewish experiences and perceptions of antisemitism in the EU every five years as planned.

2.3 Antisemitism in the United Kingdom

The UK’s Community Security Trust (CST) works closely with police to monitor antisemitism and protect Jewish communities against it. It provides rigorous and respected reports on the current levels of antisemitism.

The CST’s most recent Antisemitic Incidents’ Report, covering the period January-June 2013, records 219 antisemitic incidents across six months, representing a 30% fall in antisemitic incidents in the United Kingdom relative to the same period in 2012. Taking a longer view, there has been a medium-term decline since the record high in 2009, primarily due to the relative lack of trigger events such as those that occurred during that period. The long term trend however shows higher annual totals than 10-15 years ago.

However, it should be noted that the 2009 figure represented a historic high, with 931 incidents, many of which were linked to extreme hostility to Jews following the conflict in Gaza earlier in the year. There is a noticeable spike in antisemitic incidents when fighting intensifies in Israel and the Palestinian Territories and the potential remains for a sharp rise based on developments in the Middle East. Additional support against antisemitism is therefore particularly welcome at these times. With the growth of social media, antisemitism is finding new forms of expression, and this must be monitored and countered.

The overall fall in antisemitic incidents should not lead to complacency. The Jewish community faces a range of threats, including from Islamist extremism and the far right. Incidents of violence and intimidation continue, as do credible terrorist threats directed specifically at individuals and institutions in the Jewish community.

The fatal 2012 attack on a Jewish day school in Toulouse shows that there are still people with the intent and capability to murder Jews for their religion. A removable computer drive found on the body of Fazul Abdullah Mohammed, mastermind of the 1998 bombings of US Embassies in Nairobi and Dar Es-Salaam, showed that he and those close to him were planning attacks on the Jewish community in London. For this reason, Jewish synagogues and schools observe rigorous security, and require additional support and vigilance.

Commitment: MEPs should be particularly wary of the risk of increased antisemitism at times of heightened conflict in the Middle East.

Commitment: MEPs should be alive to hate as expressed on new social media.

Commitment: MEPs should help to ensure that assistance is provided to third-party reporting bodies and security agencies that monitor and protect vulnerable groups, including the Jewish community.

The United Kingdom's Community Security Trust is an excellent example of this sort of work.

2.4 Promoting Good Relations between Communities

Promoting good relations between communities is a way to proactively prevent tensions and ensuing racism or violence. Steps should be taken to educate people of different faiths about Judaism and the Jewish people, and proactive efforts and investment should be put in to developing good inter faith relations to prevent tensions and promote cooperation. The United Kingdom has many initiatives which provide best practice examples of this work. The website of the Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom provides a helpful directory.

Commitment: MEPs should support initiatives which promote dialogue and understanding between different groups in society, to prevent tensions and promote cooperation.

For further information, please see:

The EU Fundamental Rights Agency: www.fra.europa.eu

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance: www.coe.int/ecri

The Community Security Trust: www.thecst.org.uk

The Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom: www.interfaith.org.uk

3. Post-Holocaust Issues

3.1 Holocaust Commemoration and Education

Since 2005, the European Union has officially marked Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 January every year. The same day is observed in the United Kingdom.

In an era in which each year there are fewer survivors able to tell their stories, it is important for schools across Europe to be teaching students about the Holocaust. Bodies like the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, the Holocaust Education Trust, Yad Vashem, the Anne Frank Trust, Yom HaShoah UK and the Holocaust Centre are all very deserving of support.

Commitment: MEPs should lend their support to Holocaust education, remembrance and research.

Commitment: MEPs and prospective MEPs should take the time to show solidarity with all the victims of Nazi persecution, including Jews, Roma, homosexuals, disabled people and political opponents of Nazism.

3.2 Restitution

During the Holocaust, the Nazis used state apparatus to confiscate Jewish property, including both private property, such as homes, art and jewellery; and communal infrastructure, like synagogue buildings and graveyards. To this day, much of it has not been returned and the property remains in the hands of modern states. Sadly, many Holocaust survivors now live in dire poverty, and the return of their property could give them a better quality of life in their final years, and a legacy to pass on to their descendants.

In 2009, 47 countries (including all 28 EU-member states) came together to make the so-called Terezin Declaration, where they pledged to speed up the restitution of private and communal property to Holocaust survivors and their heirs. The following year, 43 countries endorsed a set of guidelines and best practices for the return of, or compensation for, confiscated property. At a follow-up conference in Prague in 2012, it was clear that many countries were not on track, and in a number of cases the situation has even decelerated.

In Croatia and Latvia, the relevant legislation has been delayed. In Romania, the processing of claims and payments has been extremely slow. Recent legislation risks further delays and reductions in compensation payments. In Hungary, discussions continue about restitution for heirless and hitherto unclaimed property formerly owned by Jews. Poland has one of the worst records on restitution of private property. It back-tracked on some of the commitments it made at the 2009 Terezin Conference, and was the only one of the 47 countries not to send a delegate to the 2012 Prague Conference.

The great injustice about the delays in restitution payments mean that some of the Holocaust's victims will pass away without ever seeing their property returned.

Commitment: MEPs should use the moral authority of their position to call for a just and speedy conclusion to the issue of restitution across Europe and to press the institutions of the European Union to do the same.

For more information on the records of specific countries, please see the website of the World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO) at www.wjro.org.il.

The Association of Jewish Refugees provides social and welfare services to Jewish victims of Nazi persecution in Great Britain. Its website can be viewed at: www.ajr.org.uk.

3.3 Holocaust Revisionism

Holocaust denial and revisionism is widely abhorred, but it does continue - particularly in the context of opposition to Israel. A very public example was the rhetoric of former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who even organised a two-day conference in 2006, attended by neo-Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan, to question the reality of the Holocaust. Current Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei has in the past also sought to question the veracity or extent of the Holocaust. MEPs should continue to express their disgust at such behaviour when it occurs.

In Europe, the 2008 Prague Declaration caused alarm among many Jewish communities by conflating crimes under Soviet Communism with Nazi crimes. The concern here is that some countries have attempted to deflect attention from the complicity of their wartime governments in the Holocaust, using this as a cynical attempt to avoid liability for compensation to Jewish victims. The crimes that Communist governments committed against their people should be explored and the perpetrators prosecuted, but it is important that countries acknowledge their role in the Holocaust and do not attempt to dismiss a very troubled period in their history by reference to what happened under Communism.

At times, a related trope is that many leading Communists were Jews and so the Jews as a whole are complicit in the crimes of Communism. The rationale continues that, as such, Jews in general do not deserve sympathy or compensation for what they suffered during the Holocaust. But the fact that some Jews were leading Communists did not leave Jews – as a corporate entity – with the wealth of the subjugated people in the same way that Nazi expropriation of Jewish property remains in the hands of some states.

Commitment: MEPs should challenge their European colleagues on these narratives that seek to minimise or downplay the Holocaust.

3.4 Unmarked Graves

One of the most urgent initiatives underway at the moment is the search for the unmarked graves of Holocaust victims. Across Europe, the Nazis and their accomplices murdered more than 2.5million of their victims in mass executions, burying many of the victims in mass graves, many of them unmarked. Finding these graves to give the victims an appropriate memorial is a 'race against time' to get the testimony of local, older people, who might have information about the sites and the

murders before the generation that knows first-hand what has happened passes away entirely. Organizations such as Yahad-In Unum do tremendous work in locating these grave-sites.

Please see their website for further information: www.yahadinunum.org

Commitment: MEPs should be supporting initiatives to find unmarked graves, including helping to unlock EU-funding and working with MEP colleagues from other countries to overcome some of the bureaucratic and political obstacles to this work.

□

4. EU-Israel Relations:

The UK Jewish community has a very strong attachment to the State of Israel. A 2010 survey by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) showed that 95% of UK Jews have visited Israel and that 90% view Israel as the “ancestral homeland of the Jewish people.”

The broad aspiration of the UK Jewish community is for peace, security, prosperity and equality for Israel and its neighbours.

Commitment: MEPs should promote peace, security, prosperity and equality for Israel and its neighbours.

4.1 Peace

According to the aforementioned JPR survey, the UK Jewish community overwhelmingly supports a two-state solution, with 78% favouring this as the just solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

The EU undoubtedly has a role in assisting the peace process. In addition to facilitating high level diplomatic meetings, the EU could offer a variety of incentives that encourage both sides to make strides towards peace, including financial investment packages in both Israel and the Palestinian Territories, and the promotion of trade between the two sides, building trust and links between them.

In this regard, we welcome the December 2013 statement from the 28 EU Foreign Ministers that guaranteed that, in the event of a final peace agreement, “the EU will offer Israel and the future state of Palestine a Special Privileged Partnership, including increased access to the European markets, closer cultural and scientific links, facilitation of trade and investments as well as promotion of business to business relations. Enhanced political dialogue and security cooperation will also be offered to both states.” This offer should be reinforced and detailed to give Israelis and Palestinians additional incentives to make the painful concessions necessary for peace.

In addition, the EU should promote dialogue and reconciliation at the grassroots through both political and financial support. Such projects both support a political climate that assist the peace talks, but also make it more likely that an agreement can be lasting.

Additionally, the European Commission could support exchanges of students between the EU, Israel and the Palestinian Territories as a means of building bridges and offering ‘Europe’ as a ‘safe space’ where people can talk.

In this spirit, we urge MEPs and prospective MEPs to resist calls for boycotts of Israel. By their very nature, such measures attribute blame to only one side of the conflict, and through this stigmatisation they perpetuate a one-sided narrative. This in turn prompts intransigence from both sides. Moreover, Europe should be seen as a place to unite and not further divide.

Guidelines released by the European Commission on 19 July 2013 were seeking to exclude Israeli settlements from EU funding programmes. However, Israel has expressed concern that the European Union is thereby in effect trying to dictate its borders, whereas the Oslo Accords and subsequent agreements stipulate that these should be resolved through final status negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians.

This type of action hurts the peace process by perpetuating intransigence on the Palestinian side and could cause the Palestinian leadership to become less likely to make concessions. MEPs should oppose EU funding to Non-Governmental Organisations who support boycott campaign or who actively campaign against the EU's two-state peace policy.

Commitment: MEPs should mobilise EU structures to promote Middle East peace at both the leadership level and at the grassroots.

Commitment: MEPs should oppose boycotts of Israel, which are divisive and promote a negative incentive structure that militates against peace.

4.2 Security

Israel is of great strategic importance to the European Union. It is a democratic state where there is freedom of religious practice and where women's rights and trades union rights are respected. It offers stability as an ally in a region characterised by political uncertainty. Furthermore, Israeli military and intelligence cooperation with EU States is of great mutual benefit.

Commitment: MEPs should be aware of the uniquely complicated threats to Israel's security, how Israel assists the EU and should encourage EU institutions to take account of these threats.

4.2.1 Iran

Iran's nuclear programme is edging ever closer to crossing the threshold necessary to make nuclear weapons. 20% enriched uranium is the critical point for any nuclear weapon. Once that is achieved it is relatively easy to reach the 90% level required for a nuclear weapon. The EU and the USA have led on promoting sanctions against Iran.

We welcomed the progress in talks with Iran in late 2013. However, while we do hope that the new Iranian Government is genuinely interested in steps towards greater peace and security in the Middle East, we have some ongoing concerns.

Firstly, we are worried that relaxing sanctions too quickly could allow Iran to return to a path that would enable it to produce nuclear weapons, which would imperil the safety of many countries in the Middle East and around the globe. The World must watch very carefully to ensure that there is no backsliding towards an Iranian military nuclear capability. Years of disingenuity and obfuscation from the Iranian authorities should not be naively forgotten. It is also vital that Iran knows that there is a credible military option to end its pursuit of nuclear weapons if diplomacy should fail.

Secondly, it remains crucial that positive steps on the nuclear issue do not distract from other

pressing topics. Iran continues to arm, fund and empower state and non-state actors, such as Syria and Hezbollah, to commit acts of violence against civilians. World powers should take decisive steps to prevent Iran's financing of global terrorism and the brutal repression of the Syrian people.

Finally, we note that there is evidence that the human rights situation in Iran itself deteriorated significantly by some measures since Hassan Rouhani was elected President in June. For example, there have been 367 executions from the date of his election to 25 November – on average over two state killings every day. Also, Bahá'ís are reporting increasing levels of persecution since President Rouhani's election, whilst Christian, LGBT and other minorities continue to suffer repression.

The international community must not fall into the trap of allowing hope to get in the way of genuine progress. In addition to holding Iran to account on its nuclear promises and ensuring that it cannot change a civilian programme to a military one, the World must neither forsake the Iranian people to unending human rights abuses, nor permit Iran to continue to export terror via proxies such as Syria or Hezbollah.

Commitment: MEPs should raise concerns about Iran's nuclear programme, its financing of international terror and its human rights record with the the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

4.2.2 Hezbollah

In July 2013 all EU countries proscribed the military wing of Iranian-backed Hezbollah as a terrorist organisation. This was an important step in restricting the fundraising scope of the organisation. Hezbollah have launched attacks against European and Jewish civilians worldwide and are an organisation of deep concern to the Jewish community.

In 1994, Hezbollah attacked a Jewish centre in Buenos Aires, killing 85 people. The organisation has launched multiple attacks against Israeli civilians and has expanded its activities to European soil, killing six civilians in a bus bombing in Bulgaria in 2012. There is a growing concern that Hezbollah is using European dual-nationals to plot attacks against Jews and Israelis in Europe. This was evident in 2013 where a dual Swedish-Lebanese national, Hossam Taleb Yaacoub, was convicted in a European Court for scoping Israelis and Jews to attack in Cyprus. During the court case he stated "I was only collecting information on the Jews. That's what the organisation [Hezbollah] does everywhere."

As part of the widespread intelligence cooperation between Israel and the EU, Israel is providing essential information to EU officials enabling them to enforce the proscription.

However, the 2013 ban did not include Hezbollah's political wing. It is our hope that the next step is for the EU to adopt a full proscription of the organisation, including those parts of Hezbollah that are engaged in politics. Senior figures within Hezbollah, including its deputy Secretary-General Naim Qassem, have openly admitted that there is no distinction within the organisation stating "Hezbollah has a single leadership."

The political wing operates to assist the violent nature of Hezbollah and further actions in disrupting this organisation's ability to carry out terrorist activities are needed. Currently, allies such as the USA and Canada have fully proscribed Hezbollah, and we believe the EU should take the same, necessary steps.

Commitment: MEPs should act to proscribe Hezbollah in its entirety, damaging its abilities to launch attacks in Europe, the Middle East and around the World.

4.2.3 Hamas & Palestinian Terrorism

The European Union classifies Hamas as a terrorist organisation. The organisation is responsible for suicide bombings against civilian targets and the indiscriminate shelling of Israeli civilian populations. The EU and the international community are right to continue to demand that Hamas meets basic standards before its isolation is reconsidered.

First, Hamas must recognize Israel. Second, it must agree to abide by previous agreements, and third, it must desist from terrorist attacks and enter into serious negotiations with Israel. These demands are both reasonable and proportionate.

Commitment: MEPs should refuse to meet with Hamas politicians, officials or supporters, until the movement recognises Israel; agrees to abide by previous agreements; and desists from terrorist attacks.

4.3 Prosperity

Israel is a key trading partner for the EU. The total amount of trade in goods between the EU and Israel amounted to €29.6 billion in 2012, including €17 billion in EU export and €12.6 billion in EU imports from Israel. The UK is Israel's second largest trade partner after the USA, with bilateral trade expected to increase to £4 billion by 2015.

In 2012 the Agreement on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance of Industrial Products (ACAA) was reached. This is an excellent example of the benefits of an open trading policy between the EU and Israel. The ACAA opened the respective pharmaceutical markets to one another by removing several barriers to entry in each market. This resulted in reducing the costs of production and enabling the products to enter the market at a greater speed, greatly assisting consumers.

Israel has positioned itself as a leader in technological advancements, placing a particular emphasis on the high-tech industry and medical research. Due to Israel's immense contribution to technology, as well as its being a key ally of the European Union, it is one of the few non-EU member states to be invited to take part in the Horizon 2020 programme. This project is worth €80 billion in research and development. It is important that Israel is secured as a partner for such projects so that it can contribute to such a vital sector for the EU. Further cooperation in these fields and a greater trade network between the EU and Israel will be of great benefit to both societies.

Commitment: MEPs should support and nurture the growing trade between Israel and the European Union.

4.4 Equality

Israel is a diverse and pluralistic society that seeks to guarantee equality to all its citizens, but like many Western nations, there are challenges about integration between different sectors of the population.

One example is Israel's Arab population, which makes up 20% of the country. According to a report published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in January 2010, 50% of the Arab population lives in poverty compared to 20% of Israelis overall, with widening

socioeconomic gaps. The complex issue of securing a successful resolution to the challenges facing the Bedouin requires particular and sensitive attention.

The 2003 Or Commission report into inter-ethnic tensions emphasised the urgent need to take both immediate and long-term corrective measures to tackle socio-economic gaps and improve the situation of Arab citizens of Israel. It described these as the “most sensitive and important domestic issue facing Israel today.” The report led to the establishment of a special authority for the economic development of the minority sectors in the Prime Minister’s Office in 2007; and an investment of over NIS 3 billion by the Israeli Government in various initiatives to advance equal opportunities for Arab citizens of Israel to date.

The UK Jewish community is cognizant of these challenges, and in 2010 founded the UK Task Force to inform the community about issues relating to Arab citizens of Israel and facilitate partnerships to advance the opportunities of Israel’s Arab minority. Over 30 organisations have since joined the coalition, which provides its members with valuable briefings, advice, support and contacts with Arab communities in Israel. For more information, please see the website at: www.uktaskforce.org.

Commitment: MEPs should be constructive partners in the pursuit of greater integration and equality in Israel by offering financial and political support to initiatives aimed at Arab-Jewish coexistence, and helping to support projects that empower and advance the position of Arab citizens within Israeli society.

4.5 Israel and the United Nations

We welcome the recent decision to admit Israel into the Western Europe and Others Group (WEOG) Geneva Office. This will allow Israel to play a fuller role within the UN enabling Israel to have access to the Swiss based UN institutions.

Within the context of the United Nations, the EU provides moral legitimacy to the groups that it sits in and the issues that it supports. The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is an area of the United Nations that is severely undermined by its disproportionate approach towards Israel. Israel is the only country to be listed as a permanent agenda item at the UNHRC - Agenda Item 7.

Such an obsession with Israel severely undermines the legitimacy and the effectiveness of the body to tackle some of the world’s greatest human rights concerns.

Commitment: MEPs should call on the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to ensure that international institutions such as the UNHRC act with integrity and do not disproportionately focus on Israel.

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