

What counts is the present: **Israel's alliance with the European right**

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For many years, Israel under the leadership of Benjamin Netanyahu has consistently deepened its relations with the European right, including parties of an anti-establishment and nationalist character. An important stage in this process was the government conference on combating anti-Semitism held in Jerusalem on 26–27 January. In addition to representatives of the Israeli authorities, pro-Israeli organisations from various parts of the world, and a limited number of Jewish diaspora organisations, the event was attended by right-wing politicians from the Americas, Australia and, above all, Europe. This was the second edition of the conference; however, for the first time it was linked to International Holocaust Remembrance Day, observed on 27 January.

The process of rapprochement extends beyond ad hoc political cooperation. It rests on a growing ideological affinity and a convergence of political interests, including an inclination on both sides to instrumentalise the concept of antisemitism. For Israel, the European right has become a useful partner in its dispute with the liberal international order and with an increasingly critical European public opinion; for these parties, in turn, relations with Israel serve as a source of political legitimacy and a shield against accusations of extremism. Despite controversies and tensions in Israel's relations with the Jewish diaspora, this process is likely to continue and may even deepen.

Israel's right-wing partners

The conference in Jerusalem¹ was attended by politicians from at least eleven EU Member States, predominantly representatives of the European political groups Patriots for Europe (Pfe) and the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR). In the former case, these included representatives of the National Rally (France), VOX (Spain), Fidesz (Hungary), Vlaams Belang (Belgium) and Chega (Portugal), as well as – participating remotely – the Party for Freedom (the Netherlands) and the League (Italy). In the latter case, participants included members of the Sweden Democrats (Sweden), Law and Justice (Poland), and the Alliance for the Union of Romanians (Romania). The conference was also attended

¹ 'International Conference on Combating Antisemitism – Generation of Truth', GenerationTruth, 2026, generationtruth.co.il.

by the former Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz, who is currently engaged in business activities in Israel in the high-tech sector. Meanwhile, on the sidelines of the summit, a delegation of Patriots for Europe was received by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.²

European right-wing political forces had already participated in the first edition of the conference (26–27 March 2025). On that occasion, the conference attendees included the President of the French National Rally, Jordan Bardella; the Vice-President of Fidesz, Kinga Gál; and the French Member of the European Parliament Marion Maréchal (leader of the party Identity–Liberties and the granddaughter of Jean-Marie Le Pen).

Israel, which has traditionally maintained strong ties with the American right, has for years consistently expanded these relations to include political forces in other

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parts of the world – beyond Europe, for example, the milieu of former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro (the conference was attended by his son, Flávio, a candidate in this year’s presidential election) and Argentine President Javier Milei. This policy, however, is directed most intensively towards the Member States of the European Union.

The ideological and political rapprochement between Likud (the nationalist party led by Netanyahu) and selected right-wing parties on the European continent (including VOX, Fidesz, Geert Wilders’s Party for Freedom and Matteo Salvini’s League) has been observable for many years. The formalisation of this process, however, occurred in 2025, when – first, in February – Likud (as the first party from outside the EU) joined Patriots for Europe as an observer and, subsequently – in March – representatives of European political groups travelled to Jerusalem for the first edition of the conference.

For now, Alternative for Germany (AfD) – despite its overtures – remains excluded from this policy, even though it belongs to a different European political group. As Israel’s Ambassador to Germany, Ron Prosor, put it, the party “contains elements with which the Jewish State cannot engage in dialogue”.

Notably, however, contacts have been permitted with the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), whose founder, Anton Reinthaller, served as a minister in Nazi Germany and as an SS general. Harald Vilimsky, a representative of the party, formed part of the Patriots for Europe delegation received by Netanyahu – a development the FPÖ described as a major success and the “definitive end of its isolation [*Ausgrenzung*]”.

Beyond the EU, Israel has also been strengthening its relations with the British right – including Nigel Farage’s Reform party and the British anti-Muslim activist Tommy Robinson, who visited Israel in October last year at the invitation of the Israeli government³ – as well as with Serbian nationalists from Bosnia and Herzegovina (the former President of Republika Srpska, Milorad Dodik, appeared in Jerusalem for the second time).

Ideological affinity

Israel’s alliance with the European right is founded upon a growing ideological convergence and a parallel alignment of political interests. In ideological terms, this cooperation is justified – in the

² ‘Prime Minister Netanyahu and Minister Regev meet with the Patriots of Jerusalem at the Knesset’, Government of Israel, 25 January 2026, gov.il.

³ T. Staff, ‘UK far-right activist Tommy Robinson in Israel after invite from Likud minister’, The Times of Israel, 16 October 2025, timesofisrael.com.

rhetoric of both sides – by the purported necessity of defending “Western Judeo-Christian civilisation”⁴ against an alleged alliance of the “radical left” and “radical Islam” (neither of which is defined), and, according to some participants in the conference, against Islam as such (see below).

Both the Israeli and the European sides portray these groups as extensive networks encompassing numerous ostensibly unrelated actors (including, at first glance, seemingly innocuous ones), yet at the same time as ideologically cohesive, acting in a coordinated manner and bound by a strategic alliance directed against the West and Israel.

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Netanyahu stated that radical Islam and the “most ultra-anti-Western progressives” had formed an alliance because they “want to destroy the West as we know it” and desire a “world war, first against the Jews and against the Jewish state”.⁵ According to the Israeli prime minister, his country represents the only real obstacle to an open invasion of Europe by radical Islam and, by defending itself, is therefore also defending the West as a whole. The Minister of Diaspora Affairs, Amichai Chikli (the principal organiser of the conference), stated, among other things, that: “Europe has become increasingly vulnerable to a ‘takeover from within’ by ideological forces that do not share its democratic values”.⁶ He further asserted that radical Islam constitutes the “number one threat” to Western societies.⁷

This rhetoric resonates closely with the slogans of the anti-immigration and anti-Muslim right in Europe – for example, “*Festung Europa statt Untergang des Abendlandes*” (“Fortress Europe instead of the decline of the West”), employed by the anti-immigration right in German-speaking countries (including AfD and the FPÖ). Appeals to the ‘defence of culture’, the ‘defence of civilisation’, or the need to ‘halt the [Muslim] invasion’ are present in the discourse of the majority of parties represented in Jerusalem.

The resemblance to the European right also lies in the manner in which, while employing the above-outlined rhetoric, Israeli representatives seek to pre-empt accusations of stigmatising entire religious, ethnic, or political groups. Prime Minister Netanyahu, for example, emphasised that the “invasion” threatening Europe is not an invasion by “people of a different colour, a different race, a different faith..., but people with a focused ideology, and the ideology is to destroy the West”.⁸

Despite such caveats, this constitutes a language of political insinuation, constructing an image of an enemy that is at once menacing, amorphous, and difficult to define with precision. This applies in particular to the European context, where the enemy in question is portrayed as coming from within and, to a considerable extent, concealed.

The speeches delivered by Netanyahu, President Isaac Herzog, and Minister Chikli, the official conference materials, and the audiovisual content presented during the event suggest that the alleged Islamist–leftist alliance may encompass – explicitly or implicitly – not only actually existing Islamist armed organisations in the Middle East and beyond, but also pro-Palestinian organisations as such, participants in pro-Palestinian demonstrations, Muslim religious and community institutions within

⁴ ‘Prime Minister Netanyahu and Minister Regev meet with the Patriots of Jerusalem at the Knesset’, *op. cit.*

⁵ B. Netanyahu, ‘Remarks at the Second International Conference on Combating Antisemitism in Jerusalem’, Government of Israel, 26 January 2026, gov.il.

⁶ Z. Stub, ‘At Knesset antisemitism event, visiting lawmakers blame Islamism, policy failures’, The Times of Israel, 26 January 2026, timesofisrael.com.

⁷ The 2nd International Conference on Combating Antisemitism (Day 1 – Full Video), Documenting Israel, 28 January 2026, youtube.com.

⁸ B. Netanyahu, ‘Remarks at the Second International Conference on Combating Antisemitism in Jerusalem’, *op. cit.*

the EU, Muslim immigration as such (Hungary was cited as a state that has halted it and is therefore safe for Jews), as well as states such as Turkey and Qatar.

Conversely, the category of the “radical left” may, as required, be extended to include, for example, media outlets critical of Israel, liberal universities, international organisations (including UN agencies), as well as humanitarian and human rights organisations.

At the same time, addressing the audience on International Holocaust Remembrance Day, Israeli politicians explicitly linked the phenomena under discussion with

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the past. Chikli spoke of “Islamist fanaticism deeply influenced by Nazi ideology and in some ways a continuation of it”. Netanyahu, for his part, asserted that radical Islam and “anti-Western progressives” are characterised by hatred of Jews and share common roots with antisemitism across the centuries. In the prime minister’s view, this forms part of a phenomenon that began 2,500 years ago and – despite its evolution – remains fundamentally the same to this day.

A similar blurring of distinctions – constructing a vision in which the contemporary State of Israel is identified with the entirety of Jewish history, while its enemies, opponents, and critics are equated with the persecutors of Jews throughout the ages – constitutes a persistent feature of Israeli political discourse.

The conference in Jerusalem also became a platform for the articulation of openly anti-Muslim views. In a recorded address, the Dutch politician Geert Wilders, for example, stated that “contemporary antisemitism has its roots in the deep hatred of Islam towards the Jews”.⁹ He further asserted that “Islamic Jew hatred can be found in the Quran and the hadith and goes back to Muhammad himself”, and that “the rise of antisemitism is directly linked to the ever larger Islamic fifth column within Europe’s borders”. Another speaker, Rob McCoy (a pastor associated with the late Charlie Kirk), declared that, in his view, “Islam is not a religion, but a political structure disguised as a religion”.¹⁰ He also claimed that “Sharia law seeks to impose totalitarianism on a free society” and that, in the view of his slain protégé, the real enemy was Islam.

A convergence of political interests

In political terms, the alignment of interests between Israel and the European right is multifaceted. For European actors, such a partnership provides a means of defending themselves against accusations of ‘extremism’ and facilitates their entry into the political mainstream. It also lends credibility to their political platforms by framing them as part of a broader global struggle against antisemitism. Moreover, it allows them (as illustrated, for example, by the cited remarks of Wilders) to depict antisemitism in Europe not as an endogenous phenomenon embedded in the continent’s history – including, in certain cases, in the histories of these parties themselves – but rather as something imported alongside Muslim immigrants (and thus potentially eliminable through their removal). Finally, close relations with Israel may facilitate rapprochement with the current administration in the United States. An example of this (from outside the EU) is the aforementioned Serbian politician from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Milorad Dodik, who – including as a result of such ties – was removed from the US sanctions list in October 2025 and, in February 2026, was received in Washington by representatives of Donald Trump’s administration.

⁹ A speech by Geert Wilders at the Second International Conference on Combating Antisemitism, Documenting Israel, 28 January 2026, youtu.be.

¹⁰ The 2nd International Conference on Combating Antisemitism (Day 1 – Full Video), *op. cit.*

For Hungary's Fidesz – the only governing party in this group alongside Italy's League – close relations with Israel yield a range of benefits extending beyond party political considerations to encompass foreign policy, business interests, and historical policy. These ties, for example, enable it to employ rhetoric containing elements of historical revisionism (such as the rehabilitation of Regent Miklós Horthy or the downplaying of Hungary's role in the Holocaust) without fear of serious criticism from the Israeli authorities.

Israel does not intervene in historical matters on a universal basis, but rather where doing so serves its domestic or foreign policy objectives or helps to preserve its interpretative hegemony over issues related to the past. States and political actors with whom Israel seeks to maintain good relations (for example, Hungary), or at least working relations (for example, Russia), may therefore expect either a restrained response or none at all.

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For Israel, the deepening of relations with nationalist, anti-immigration and Eurosceptic political forces in Europe (and in some cases also pro-Russian – such as the FPÖ or Fidesz) represents an important and forward-looking instrument of foreign policy, particularly in light of their rising electoral support. As the Israeli minister Miri Regev stated: “The connection to the Patriots of Europe is a strategic move that strengthens Israel’s standing in the international arena”.¹¹

At the same time – and this should be emphasised – this instrument is employed alongside, rather than in place of, existing instruments. Despite the tensions and difficulties it entails, this policy does not significantly affect Israel’s ties with its traditional partners in Europe, such as Jewish diaspora organisations, pro-Israeli lobbying groups, institutions focused on Jewish history, mainstream political forces, or national security establishments. Representatives of the latter typically have extensive experience of contacts with their Israeli counterparts, often hold Israel’s military and intelligence capabilities in high regard, and tend to be particularly receptive to Israeli narratives that frame issues primarily in terms of security threats.

From Israel’s perspective, these constitute distinct instruments employed for different purposes, united by a common denominator: the national interest as defined by the country’s political leadership (which, for the past seventeen years, has remained essentially unchanged). In its dealings with each of these bodies, institutions, forums, or groups, Israel adopts a different language and line of argumentation and delegates different representatives to maintain those contacts.

Questions of current politics are, however, increasingly taking precedence over historical considerations. As Israel’s Foreign Minister Gideon Sa’ar stated in February 2025, when justifying the establishment of formal relations with the European right: “Part of these parties have bad roots. But we look at their deeds on the ground today”.¹²

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1. It counters and delegitimises voices critical of Israel;
2. When in power, it may block decisions at the EU level that are unfavourable to Israel (a role currently performed on a regular basis by Fidesz); this constrains the EU’s ability to deploy its

¹¹ ‘Prime Minister Netanyahu and Minister Regev meet with the Patriots of Jerusalem at the Knesset’, *op. cit.*

¹² ‘Foreign Minister Israel Katz meets with heads of the Jewish community in Belgium’, *Government of Israel*, 26 February 2025, gov.il.

collective political leverage in relations with Israel and encourages – in line with Israeli preferences – the bilateralisation of relations with individual Member States;

3. In international relations, it dispenses with the language of human rights and international law (which is problematic from Israel's perspective), and instead readily prioritises issues related to Muslim immigration and internal security (an approach regarded as desirable from Israel's standpoint);
4. It demonstrates an interest in the redefinition of antisemitism increasingly advanced by the authorities in Jerusalem, whereby attitudes towards the State of Israel and its current policies would become the principal criterion for determining what constitutes antisemitism.

Moreover, owing to their often problematic past, these parties have comparatively less room for manoeuvre vis-à-vis Israel than parties unburdened by such historical legacies.

At the same time, this is a policy that – thus far – has not generated significant costs for the Israeli authorities in their relations with mainstream European political forces.

Tensions in relations with the diaspora

As early as 2025, the formal establishment of relations with European right-wing parties, followed by their invitation to the conference in Jerusalem, generated tensions in Israel's relations with the Jewish diaspora in Western Europe and the United States. Consequently, several key organisations – including the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), the American Jewish Committee (AJC) and the European Jewish Congress (EJC) – as well as a number of prominent figures (such as the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom, Ephraim Mirvis, and the French intellectual Bernard-Henri Lévy) withdrew from participation in the event. The EJC's then President, Ariel Muzicant of Austria (who served as President of the Jewish Community of Vienna between 1998 and 2012), in a letter sent to the Israeli newspaper *The Jerusalem Post*,¹³ went so far as to voice public criticism of the authorities in Jerusalem – a step that is relatively uncommon for organisations of this kind.

He stated, for example, that in the eighty years since the end of the Second World War, activists and leaders of many of the invited parties had been among those

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opposing the Jewish community in its struggle against antisemitism and Holocaust denial. He further observed that these are forces that contest liberal values such as the rule of law, human rights, and freedom of expression – values which, for Jews, constitute the “oxygen” essential for survival. The legitimisation of such parties by the Israeli authorities therefore amounts, in his view, to a “stab in the back” for Jews in the diaspora. He also emphasised that European right-wing politicians were motivated to participate in the event not by affection for Israel, but by the desire to obtain from it an “international stamp of approval”.

The objections raised by the diaspora – although widely covered in the media – did not halt the development of Israel's relations with the European right, nor did they significantly affect the guest lists for either the first or the second edition of the conference. Consequently, this year the majority of its largest organisations declined to participate; at the same time, however, they refrained from voicing public criticism.

¹³ E. Breuer, 'EJC blasts Chikli for inviting far-right figures to antisemitism conference', *The Jerusalem Post*, 17 March 2025, [jpost.com](https://www.jpost.com).

In the context of this year's event, Muzicant confined himself to a critical remark regarding the participation of the FPÖ representative, Harald Vilimsky, in the meeting of Patriots for Europe with Prime Minister Netanyahu. He described it as "distasteful", particularly given that it took place on the eve of International Holocaust Remembrance Day.¹⁴

Beyond the episodic tensions outlined above, cooperation with the European right has not generated more serious repercussions for Israel. Any criticism from the diaspora has been sporadic and has neither altered its overall attitude towards the state as such nor diminished its willingness to support it.

For a significant portion of the diaspora, the bond with the State of Israel represents one of the constitutive elements of Jewish identity. Moreover, for the organisations in question, advocacy on behalf of Israeli policy – unconditional advocacy, as the war in Gaza has demonstrated – constitutes one of the central dimensions of their activity, notwithstanding the discomfort it may occasionally entail.

An illustration of this may once again be found in the stance of Muzicant himself, currently Vice-President of the World Jewish Congress. In the same interview with the Austrian press in which he described Vilimsky's presence at the meeting with Netanyahu as "distasteful", he called for an audit of the finances of non-governmental organisations critical of Israel (such as Amnesty International), suggesting that they are funded and directed by states hostile to Israel.

Summary

Israel's alliance with the European right is the result of transformations occurring both within Israel itself and on the European continent. Politically, the country has for decades been evolving towards increasingly radical nationalism. Moreover, the fact that Israel has been governed almost continuously since 2009 by Likud – a party representing an assertive form of Jewish ethnic nationalism – has rendered it increasingly difficult to distinguish between matters of state policy and those of party line.

The current government (formed in December 2022) is not only the most radical in Israel's history, but also the most extreme political constellation to have emerged within the parameters of the country's political landscape. It comprises Likud as well as parties such as Religious Zionism and Otzma Yehudit (Jewish Strength), which openly espouse doctrines of Jewish racial supremacy.

The policies of this cabinet have resulted not only in an attempt to dismantle the independence of Israel's judiciary (in 2023) and in the acceleration of Jewish settlement expansion in the West Bank, but also in war crimes and crimes against humanity committed on a large scale during the war in the Gaza Strip. In connection with these events, Prime Minister Netanyahu and the (now former) Minister of Defence, Yoav Gallant, were made subject in November 2024 to international arrest warrants issued by the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Israel's political evolution has been accompanied by a growing conflict with the institutions and principles of the so-called liberal international order. The state has described the United Nations as a "terrorist entity",¹⁵ and declared its Secretary-General, António Guterres, persona non grata. During the conference in Jerusalem, Minister Chikli stated, for example, that the "progressive left has transformed human rights into a weapon against Jews and the Jewish state" and that "political correctness and the fight against antisemitism cannot co-exist".

¹⁴ R. Treichler, 'Muzicant über Treffen Netanjahu mit Vilimsky: „Rechtsextremist bleibt Rechtsextremist“', *Profil*, 26 January 2026, profil.at.

¹⁵ 'The UN has become a 'terrorist entity,' asserts Israel's UN envoy', *The Times of Israel*, 15 May 2024, [timesofisrael.com](https://www.timesofisrael.com).

Israel's evolution has been reflected in its perception in Europe and in the cautious distancing from it by some of its former allies and sympathisers. This process has also been facilitated by the passage of time since the Second World War (with the result that the memory of the Holocaust plays a diminishing role in shaping perceptions of the state), as well as by the growing proportion of Muslims among the citizens and residents of the EU.

According to a Pew Research Centre public opinion survey conducted in June 2025, the proportion of respondents expressing a negative or very negative view of Israel in twenty-four selected countries worldwide stood, in the five largest EU Member States, at: 64% (Germany), 63% (France), 66% (Italy), 75% (Spain) and 62% (Poland).

In the circumstances that have emerged, Israel's governing right is seeking new political allies. In this context, the intensification of relations with segments of the European right is – as outlined above – particularly advantageous. Consequently, Israel, much like Russia or the United States under the Trump administration, now acts vis-à-vis the EU as an external actor that lends support to Eurosceptic and centrifugal forces, which exploit and amplify – genuine – social tensions related to immigration and cultural change.

Like both powers, the authorities in Jerusalem are likewise interested in weakening Europe's liberal political acquis (as evidenced by the delegitimisation of human rights and so-called political correctness), fuelling internal polarisation (including by reinforcing anti-Muslim sentiments), and undermining the cohesion of the EU in its external policy.

Israel also seeks to undermine trust in institutions, including the media. The two editions of the Jerusalem conference to date were held under the respective slogans "Ambassadors of Truth" and "Generation Truth", with a clear suggestion – as evidenced, for example, by the opening of this year's edition¹⁶ – that there exists an international conspiracy directed against Israel (encompassing even mainstream media outlets such as the BBC), which "hates the truth" and deliberately distorts the image of the state.

¹⁶ The 2nd International Conference on Combating Antisemitism (Day 1 – Full Video), *op. cit.*