

## **Israel and Europe: Historical Burdens and Future Prospects**

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### **I**

In a recent festive address, “The Idea of Europe”, philosopher George Steiner said that “Europe is made up of coffee-houses, of cafés[...] Draw the coffee-house map and you have one of the essential markers of ‘the idea of Europe’”. England, alas, is outside Steiner’s European map, because he thinks it has no real cafés. Oxford today, and London too, may well prove Steiner wrong. But even more interestingly, Tel Aviv – if measured by Steiner’s rod – has been part and parcel of Europe since her earliest infancy. A true daughter of Warsaw, Vienna and Berlin, Tel Aviv’s coffee-houses were always the real thing, complete with newspapers and chess boards, urban eros and heated conversation on politics, arts and ideas.

Contrary to common wisdom, the chasm between Israel and the European Union is not primarily a rift in international relations. On the front of formal agreements, things have never been so good. Israel maintains friendly contacts with most of the European nations. It enjoys a preferred status in the E.U. in trade relations and scientific exchange, and puts it to excellent use. Despite bitter

diplomatic reproaches of Israel's settlement and military policies, the E.U. has maintained its commitment to Israel's existence and security. And while the E.U. may have neither a focused Middle Eastern vision, nor an orchestrated policy on global affairs, it is nonetheless deeply committed to its part in the international "Quartet" advancing peace negotiations.

A chasm nevertheless exists, and it is far more tragic than a mere diplomatic fallout would be. Societies, not governments, are moving apart. Israelis and European — not just Israel and the E.U. — are more estranged than they have ever been.

This is a recent development. Cultural and human communication lines have gone awry. It was not quite so in the mid-twentieth century, not even in the aftermath of the destruction of European Jewry by the Nazis. In 1950, the majority of Israel's population was European by birth and education. Back then, many Europeans remembered Jewish neighbours and friends personally. European cultures had fresh memories of their former Jewish members, and Israeli culture was an offspring newly weaned, in the bloodiest manner, from what so many people still took to be their mother-continent, mother-culture and mother tongues.

Such tortuous intimacy is not what we experience today. A generation has died; cultural ties have largely been severed or have gone stale; history has retreated into academia; memory has blurred into ritual platitudes. Ignorance prevails. "Six million Jews?" asked the French exchange student in Freiburg, her eyes wide with horror, "But that is terrible! I had no idea! Are you sure?" No one ever told her. And there was the nice elderly lady from Budapest who asked me whether many people in Israel still speak Jewish.

One mustn't underplay the fascination with and commitment of many educated Europeans to the Jewish past of their countries, but much of this energy is dedicated to scholarship, museums and monuments. Little of it reaches out to the living world of Europe's lost Jewish millenium, let lone the living world of its Israeli descendants today. Furthermore, Europe, as a nascent federation, barely relates to its collective cultural past. A former French prime minister responded with a wistful smile when I told him of my quest for a new dialogue with Europe. The E.U., he said, is not ripe for historical dialogue — it is still largely an economic and administrative superstructure.

This cultural, historical and moral black hole cannot be neglected any longer. Not after the bad start of the 21st century, the breakdown of the Oslo agreements, the eruption of Palestinian-Israeli violence and the aftermath of September 11. As the stakes and tensions of Middle Eastern politics shoot up, the European-Israeli chasm becomes not just saddening, but also dangerous. In a climate of mutual distrust, the E.U., national governments and European opinion leaders cannot help restore peace in the Middle East.

Perhaps more time is needed for the E.U. to absorb is 10 incoming members, craft its constitution and create its cultural personality. Be as we await the maturity of this process, the dialogue between Europeans and Israelis is losing all traces of subtlety.

In the view of many Europeans, particulary of the New and Old Left, Israel is a colonial country perpetrating the crimes of the old and evil Europe in the colonial battlefield of the Middle East. It is trigger-happy, soil-hungry and atavistic. It embodies the worst of

erstwhile European sins: imperialism, militarism and crude power politics. Even worse, Israel has converted the Jews from a persecuted people to a nation of oppressors: The victims have become storm troopers.

People who hold such views are not ignorant in the ordinary sense, nor are they merely malicious. They are educated people whose views range from a denunciation of the Sharon government, to a wholesale disgust with the state of Israel. Most critics of Israel would angrily refute any charge of anti-Semitism, and in most cases, they would be justified.

There is, however, a slippery slope between offhand rejection of Israel's current policies and the deepening chasm of remembrance. Europeans increasingly turn away from the Holocaust as a living memory. By no means do they forget its victims; but these victims are monumentalized to such a degree that they are no longer connected to their living progeny. Martyrs, especially in the Christian imagination, are not supposed to have living – and kicking – grandchildren. It is a grave mistake for Europeans to forget that Israel today, collective neuroses and all, displays variety of human reactions to a very real catastrophe only two generations ago.

Today, a new kind of dialogue is urgently needed. Many urge Israelis to return to Europe, to restore a critical relationship and historical partnership. Europe, for its part, cannot neglect its Jewish past if it wants a political foothold in the Middle East, and if it wishes to create a cultural identity for itself.

## II

Shortly after September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, I was invited to address a conference hosted by the European Commission in Brussels. It was a hurried, but earnest attempt to whip up an “intercultural dialogue” between entities that were loosely dubbed “Europe” and “the Middle East”. It was organized by officials of the European Union and some well-meaning academics who wanted to make European citizens face what they called “Europe’s Others”. I think they mainly wanted to talk with Muslims, but, perhaps as an afterthought, and perhaps because of the cover-term “Middle East”, two Israeli participants and one Belgian rabbi were thrown in for good measure. It was a thought-provoking event, but there was something fuzzy and unsatisfactory about the breathless attempt to break new dialogical ground under the immediate shadow of Ground Zero.

I was expected to represent the Jewish-Israeli aspect of Europe's “Others”. The gracious moderator of my session even paraphrased the Palestinian-American thinker Edward Said on this point: “Images of the Other,” he said, “are central to our own identities. Any European identity constructed in this day and age must contain ‘a demarcation of the non-European’.”

Now that was a very peculiar experience. Few of us would feel at ease in

being described as anybody's "Other", or even invited to a high-profile conference in Brussels to represent "the Other". But this case was especially awkward. "Dear Europeans," I told my hosts, "what 'Other' is it that you are talking about? My personal biography is more or less representative of just over fifty percent of Jews living in Israel today. My ancestors lived in western, central and eastern Europe for a thousand years. My eight great-grandparents and four grandparents were Europeans. One of them had a corn mill in the Ukraine. Another was a pharmacist in Bessarabia. Another studied history in Heidelberg, and another studied literature in Prague, and yet another wrote his thesis in London. They were all Europeans, or so they thought. And their sense of belonging to Europe was strongly based on the Enlightenment, *die Aufklärung*. Let us get our historical bearings straight: the Enlightenment, that eighteenth-century movement of ideas incorporating tolerance, pluralism and universalism, was harshly and bitterly rebuked by Edward Said and his followers. It is criticized today as Eurocentric and overbearing. But it was the Enlightenment that had opened for my ancestors a door into a humanist, secular, non-sectarian Europe. Thanks to the Enlightenment, they could hope to belong to a civilization that accepted non-Christians, transcended nationality and class, and promoted the values that most of my forebears cherished: education, progress, creativity, justice, value for all human life.

For two or three hopeful generations, Jews were able to feel, think and act as Europeans. But in the early twentieth century, when the Enlightenment's values were being assaulted by enemies far worse than Edward Said, it appeared that almost all other inhabitants of this continent became strictly French, German, Italian, and Polish or Serb. It appeared that Jews like my grandparents remained just about the only Europeans. And at that point, still rejoicing in their new-found European culture and learning, they found out to their bitter disappointment that they have had always been Europe's Others, even though they had been in residence for a thousand years. They found out that their newly discovered freedom and humanism had become, to the new nationalists and xenophobes and race-specialists, deeply suspect. They discovered that Enlightenment universalism itself had become, to its enemies, "Jewish".

And so, following the Great War and following the Bolshevik Revolution, at a last tick of the final clock before the Nazi rise to power, my grandparents understood: they could not even hope to remain in place as Europe's insider-Others. Even the Shtetl was now doomed. They were forced to flee in order to survive elsewhere, as Europe's outsider-Others. They had to give up their long developed, hard-earned, much-valued and deeply loved European-ness. Or perish.

Luckily for us, their progeny, they read the clock correctly. All the other relatives, all the uncles and aunts and cousins who did not flee, were murdered. The corn mill and the pharmacy were burnt down and the synagogues razed to the ground. The University of Heidelberg sent out a formal letter revoking my great-uncle's doctoral title. And then, letters from Europe no longer came to Jerusalem. Then there was silence.

Nothing at all remained, so it seemed, from a thousand years of belonging. Just silence. My mother-in-law, Lotte Wreschner, was one of the few who survived, although her family did not escape far enough from their home in Frankfurt. They were caught by the Gestapo in Amsterdam. She described to us what it was like to return, in the summer of 1945, from Theresienstadt to Amsterdam: "All was silent. It was a graveyard," she said, "I could not stay there."

### III

So my grandparents came to the Land of Israel, also Palestine, and it became the State of Israel in 1948. This land was neither dead nor silent: on the contrary, the noise of creating the modern Hebrew state must have helped to stifle horrendous memories, at least for a while, deep in survivors' minds. The young Israel was full of the sounds of new words, fresh politics and adamant nation-building. There were new children who

spoke only Hebrew and knew nothing of the old towns and rivers, knew nothing of the other, dead children. These youngsters – me and my generation - had never seen a cathedral or a pogrom or a Nazi storm trooper.

I think all four of my grandparents, in their different ways, were proud to be Israelis. They did not recognize quite how bitterly the new dispute with the Palestinians was to evolve. Perhaps they were not aware of it, because they were not really looking at the Palestinians at all. Like Lot's wife, that generation was constantly fighting the urge to gaze over its shoulder at the Europe they left behind, burning Shtetls and Judenrein cities. But, unlike Lot's wife, they did not become petrified. They survived and rebuilt families. They created a new society and put all their hopes into it: cosmopolitan, humanist, Jewish, Zionist. These hopes did not fully converge and overlap, but the children grew up under a strong sun. Sometimes a dark hint emerged at a dinner table, in a classroom: pogroms and storm-troopers. But young Israelis resided in a new culture hastily, desperately invented for them. , We read Erich Kästner in Hebrew translation, but Europe dimmed away on a far horizon, along with its cathedrals and storm troopers.

Not so for my grandparents. For the rest of their lives they remembered their formative landscapes, the forests and rivers and town squares and

snow. Perhaps refugees everywhere, all emigrants around the world, dream similar dreams of their lost childhood vistas. But deeper still, in a more complex and bitter way, they longed for their lost European-ness. They read Europe's books, played its music, sang its arias, and recalled its landscapes in aquarelles and needlework. Yet Europe did not remember them. A neighboring family took over the house, a colleague landed in the university post, the Soviet government nationalized the corn mill. This is the way wars go.

But Europe forgot them. Post-war Europe, Cold-War Europe, and even the emerging Community of Europe, appeared uninterested in remembering the Jews that had once been Europeans. Forgetting they had ever been part of its own flesh. Forgetting them, and the whole Jewish-European millennium, quickly and efficiently.

Today my European friends may well reject this last statement, claiming that Europe has not forgotten its Jewish past and giving many good examples from scholarship, literature, monuments and museums. Quite so. But think of it this way: no human signal, no living tentacle from the violently torn worlds of their youth, ever reached my grandparents in their humble new homes in Jerusalem and in the Kibbutz. Except that the University of Heidelberg agreed to restore the doctoral title to my great uncle, and even invited him for a visit. But Joseph Klausner, the most

German of all Jerusalem professors, a former admirer of Berlin, a former lover of Heidelberg, refused to set foot on German soil again.

It was the Holocaust that killed and buried the Jewish-European millennium. Just as Hitler intended, it buried the bones of everyday life. For young Israelis and for well-meaning Europeans today, it is almost impossible to look at a thousand years of interaction, of human meeting and trading and conversation, of travel and migration and mutual influence, of manufacture and creativity and simple neighborhood and companionship, other than through the dark glass of Auschwitz. Six years of genocide effectively buried a thousand years of life.

In my book, *Israelis in Berlin*, I wrote that today's Germans and Jews meet at bookshelves, podiums and desks. But they no longer meet at a table. Gone is the German-Jewish "Tisch", gone are the German-Jewish "Tischreden", two traditions that for a long beautiful moment came together. Gone is the table on which Mendelssohn and Lavater played chess, the table where Rachel Varnhagen drank wine with poets and philosophers, and the Heidelberg beerhouse table where my great -uncle Klausner and his friend the poet Tschernikhovsky revelled in mixed student company. Ah, that mixed company, mixed for the first and last time in history: men and women, Jews and gentiles, Russians and Germans, erotically arguing over Nietzsche and Tolstoy, drinking,

touching, quoting long passages by heart. Today we are left with podiums and monuments. We deliver conference talks.

## IV

Israel's European legacies have now blended with other cultural imports, creating a unique culture, art and cuisine, sizzling with new admixtures and blends. Trends of multiculturalism, now prevalent in Israeli discourse, are most often aimed at Israel's North African and Middle Eastern heritage. It is fashionable to play down our European chromosomes, to class them as so-called Ashkenazi elitism. It is fashionable to detest contemporary Europe, its media and intellectuals, its shallow hostility and unthinking anti-Israeli stance. Thus, both nationalists and internationalists in Israel are turning their backs on Europe. Both right-leaning and left-leaning Israelis find little value in Israel's European past. It is a poisoned bed of anti-Semitism for some, a watermark of cultural elitism for others.

Many younger Israelis are all too happy to turn their backs on their families' past. Our schools taught us the history of persecution, pogroms, Holocaust. We were fed with a classroom version of the Zionist ideal as the one-way, heavily ideologized response to all that. Schoolchildren

often find this history “boring”, but deeper in their minds they probably find it humiliating and unbearable: no knights, no castles, no kings and no princesses. The cathedrals were never ours. Moses Mendelssohn was an ugly man. You need mature eyes in order to see his beauty. You need to be very grown up in order to see the charm, the excitement, the Eros of the history of the Jews as Europeans.

So Europe today is – for us - the offspring of our persecutors, not of our ancestors. We see it as the progeny of crusaders and inquisitors, not of medieval thinkers and Enlightenment philosophers and modernist writers. You need mature eyes in order to see that Europe’s numerous intellectual genes include Aquinas’ Maimonides, Locke’s Adam and Eve, Kirkegaard’s Abraham, and Joyce’s Bloom. Or even, simply, that towns and villages from Portugal to Lithuania still carry the footprints, the fingerprints, the builders’ and artisans’ and merchants’ prints, of a thousand years of Jewish European belonging. The corn mill. The pharmacy. The tools and the shelves. This is a Europe we find so hard to unearth.

Historical amnesia is two-sided. For many Europeans, too, the Jews are a vague and embarrassing memory. Jewish history is a matter of hypersensitivity, of treading lightly and choosing words carefully. Israel, on the other hand, is becoming increasingly alien and at times

infuriating. While the murdered Jews have been promoted to the status of martyrs, their living alive and kicking grandchildren are gradually fading from European memory as descendents of Europe's Jews.

So instead of remembering, we tend to escalate the pain. The official Israel has always cashed on European guilt feelings. This, in the twenty-first century, is a simplistic tune to play. Many informed Europeans have accumulated anger against Israeli policies in the Middle East, which, due to historical sensitivities, remained saddled until it began to steam out during the last five years. Political dialogue today is saddled and sullied by accusations of anti-Semitism on one side, emotional manipulation on the other side, both masquerading as "historical context". But surely this slalom of guilt and victimhood is not all that a millennium of Jewish-European history can afford us. Let us explore some alternatives.

## V

A mature look at Jewish European history is the kind of text that an Israeli student, regardless of personal family origins, can use when coming to study in Hamburg or in Bologna. It is the kind of backpack equipment that would help young Israelis to roam Andalusia or Silesia. It is the trove of insights that a young European may use when coming to

visit Tel Aviv, study in Jerusalem, or stay in a kibbutz. It is history perused not merely for the academia, nor for maintaining any “official story”. Nor is it necessarily a post-Zionist refutation of holy cows and holy grails. I am aiming at the sensitive, relevant scholarship that can lead both Israelis and Europeans - persons, not governments - back to their shared usable past.

My position is easy to misunderstand. I am not making a political bid for Israeli membership in the European Union; this current issue belongs in different discussions on other forums. Nor am I lamenting a lost European world. I have never belonged to that world and do not yearn for it. What I am attempting is simply to assert our membership in European history. We fully belong in it, and it fully belongs to us. Israelis should be able to go to Europe not just as tourists, but also as well-read travellers who have plenty of cultural real estate – their own ancestral legacy - to trace and explore. I would wish Europeans to read about Israelis and talk to them with more familiarity, more intimacy. That is why the shared political values are so crucial: Israelis must be reminded of their historical stake in pluralism, Enlightenment and democracy. Reminded by way of rebuke, and reminded by way of reassurance.

Nor is this a proposal for Israelis to give up being Israeli and head for

Europe. Israeli culture in its present phase, alive and sizzling, can never be pushed back into any of the diverse bottles from which it was concocted. This is not about a specific cultural and geographical nostalgia specific to Israelis of European origins. Because all Israelis, Jews and Arabs, Sephardi and Ashkenazi, were deeply affected by European history and culture.

Finding new roads to the Jewish European millennium can help Israelis today gain a better understanding of their past, and particularly of their judicial and political culture. Most crucial, I suggest, is to understand that Jewish ideas and texts did not only affect Israel directly, as partial heir to European Jewry. They also affected us immensely through what we call “general culture”, particularly the ideas of civil society, rule of law, social democracy and liberal democracy that shaped Israel’s public sphere.

Europeans – by which I mean persons people living today who are developing a sense of belonging to Europe as an old-new entity – may also benefit from this memory. Europe’s thousand years of accommodating Jews ended abruptly in the mid-twentieth century. It is too early to tell whether Jews living in Europe today are able to take up, demographically and culturally, the legacy of the lost millennium. They are certainly are not in a position to inherit our forebears’ social and

economic place in pre-war Europe. I have deep respect for present-day Jewish Europeans, and at times a quiet *ressentiment* of cousinhood (rather different from the stickier relationship with American Jews). but they are not, and cannot be, the sole heirs of all our common forbears.

Can historical memory work for us rather than against us? Perhaps Israelis would become more plausible partners for dialogue, for political involvement, even for European peace making, if the some of the severed links were reconstructed. If Europe could forgo Israel's "Otherness", and pick up some of the lost neighborhood, onetime intimacy, and shared values – perhaps then it might use its weight far more powerfully and effectively in the Middle East. Perhaps it could even invoke some of the better aspects of Europe's past. Not all memories are haunting; some are comforting. Some are even inspiring: a springboard for the future. Jewish tradition has always acknowledged the guiding force of history, its legitimate use for new energies and hopes.

This is the juncture where at which scholarship can do well. It need not be recruited in the service of any political agenda: suffice it to be exciting, tangible, to have a cultural edge and find its way to general public discussion. History can make a difference for young Israelis and Europeans, inspire new curiosity and set off new interaction. But this cannot be done with watered-down or tailor-made versions of history. Almost everyone can become fascinated by complexities.

I would like to mention several historical focal points, such that might enable both Israelis and Europeans to reassemble the memory of the Jewish-European millennium for the benefit of the present generation. These are certainly not the only possible corridors to a meaningful historical insight, but they may serve as thought provoking examples.

It is vital for both Israelis and Europeans today to remember that early Zionism and the modern Hebrew culture were born within a European intersection of ideas. Most schoolchildren are told that one event in Paris – the Dreyfus trial – was the cradle of political Zionism. Far fewer are aware of the role of Berlin, to take one significant example, as the nursery of modern Hebrew literature and scholarship. Our schools do not tell of the powerful effects that such ideas as diverse as cultural nationalism, Romanticism, the *Rechtsstaat*, *Bildung*, biblical criticism – all of them nineteenth-century German ideas! – had on the nascent culture of modern Israel.

We do have many specialist studies at our disposal, a great deal of knowledge about Jewish-European writers who traveled to Palestine and took part in the early construction of the new Hebrew culture. We know about cultural mediators such as publishers and translators, newspapers and journals. We know about the Hebrew University and the beginnings

of modern Hebrew language scholarship. We know about social theorists and youth movements. We know about the loose network of ideologies and beliefs that created the fabric of Zionism. But some aspects of the general picture constantly escape us. We are not paying enough attention to the European fingerprints on Israel's political culture, on Israel's legal culture, on Israel's civil society and public discourse.

Israel does not yet have a full-fledged written history of ideas. A major storyline would be our grand-scale attempt to reconcile socialism with Jewish nationalism, our subsequent retreat from socialism, the move to a free market and rights-based democracy, and the ongoing quest for social justice and human solidarity. This line, running a different course from the well-trodden paths of political history, also encompasses the unique story of Israel's judiciary and the vicissitudes of Israel's public sphere. Such a history of ideas, and indeed the Israeli history of political thought and its implications in political reality, is yet to be written.

Clearly, the European impacts upon this history are multifarious, and some of them delve into the very structures of social and political history. Therefore, despite my deep respect and personal fascination with Bialik and Agnon, with Moses Hess and Achad Ha'am, with Rosenzweig and Scholem and Buber, I think that their well-documented mediation between European traditions and the new Israeli polity are only part of

the story, the better-known part. A great deal of attention has been paid to the birth of the new Hebrew literature and on the axis connecting Odessa, Warsaw and Berlin. Other scholars have followed the line running between Berlin, Heidelberg and Frankfurt and the Hebrew University on Mount Scopus in Jerusalem. But there is more to the European contexts of Israeli culture than literature, science and philosophy, important as they are.

Not nearly enough attention has been paid to the European, and especially the German, impact on the political and legal culture of early Zionism and early Israel. But, as Shlomo Avineri and several others have shown, our political system – indeed the very core of our political thought – draws directly on nineteenth-century Europe. To make things even more complex, the European ideas themselves that deeply affected the nascent state of Israel themselves had important Jewish roots. It was a secular European culture drawing on the deep sources of the Jewish-European millennium that fed early Zionism and the new state of Israel with inspirations that are yet to be mapped.

## VI

For decades. Germany has assumed Europe's voice in conducting this dialogue with Israel. The guilt-ridden first and second generations of post-war Germans were those who presented Israel

with its economic and political safety net, made the first large investments in science, education and transportation, and granted Israel its special status in what was originally known as the European Common Market. In terms of historical memory, too, the European-Israeli dialogue was largely Germanic.

Three results have emerged from this process, none of which simplify the dialogue between Israelis and Europeans today. First, relations between Israel and Europe have remained relations between governments. The memory of the Holocaust, in particular, has been formalized. Government officials have overseen the creation of monuments and museums, textbooks and memory rituals. Only recently have Israelis begun to make their way to Europe, to their family and personal pasts. But very few Europeans, including Germans, go in the opposite direction and try to discover present-day Israel.

Second, most nations — most notably France — whose relations with Israel have been based on *realpolitik* and opportunism, seldom troubled themselves to carry on a genuine historical and cultural dialogue with Israel. Other nations, notably Eastern European nations under communist regimes, have disavowed their own Jewish history. Still others have only paid lip service to the imprints of millennia of Jewish European existence. Writers and intellectuals often have a longer memory. But how many school children living next door to the Judengasse, The Old Jewry or the Montjuic, know anything of their former residents?

The third issue derives from the second: The memory of the Holocaust threatens to eradicate the Jewish-European millenium. It blurs the significant role Jews had in building modern Europe —

not as hapless victims, but as active and effective thinkers and doers. I have written elsewhere, and much more must be said, of the Hebrew and Jewish origins of European republicanism, political progress, freedom of thought, and yes, European federalism. During their European millenium, Jews were not merely guests-gone-bad; they were active agents in Europe's modernization.

Modern Israel, too, owes a great deal to its European sources. Founded as a social democracy by a largely Eastern European-born leadership, it always managed to put democracy above socialism, separation of powers above the delusion of equality, and a strong judiciary above political charisma. Founded on European ideas of majority rule and freedom of thought it remained, in its own vocal way, true to these principles. Not least because two European values that Israel carries deep in its chromosomes - the quest for humane social justice and the love of a good argument — are among the ancient Jewish legacies bequeathed, over centuries, to Europe itself. Israeli public discourse, even at its worst, has always been deeply self-critical, genuinely pluralistic, and profoundly free. This came from the best of Europe, Europe when Jews still resided there.

In this context, the great error of the European Union is that it ignores Israeli civil society in favour of official Israel. The process of bringing Israel and Europe closer together again must take place mainly between societies and cultures, not between governments. Europe itself is currently changing its image and may possibly begin to revive its long-term memory. Some of the 10 new nations from Central and Eastern Europe that will join the European Union next year bear powerful remnants of the past Jewish-European millenium. The presence of Poland, Hungary and the Czech

Republic may help initiate broach a long-term historical relationship between Europeans and Israelis.

The importance of this relationship can not be understated. During the last decade, Israeli historical tourism has brought many native-born Israelis to Castile, Prague, Berlin and Auschwitz. Only now are we returning to the Europe that has shaped and molded, to some degree, the fate and the ideas of all Israelis, Jews and Arabs, Sephardi and Ashkenazi, modern and traditional. Similarly, the numerous fingerprints our ancestors left in Europe should provide us with a sense of belonging that transcends issues of the E.U. membership and trade agreements. Our stake in modern Europe can be claimed in the form of cultural real estate, enriching human lives regardless of religion and nationality. I, for one, am proud to think that Arab immigrants can now find a safe haven in Europe thanks, in part, to the moral ideas and notions of tolerance that a less fortunate minority, my own ancestors, inspired and promoted.

If there is to be new dialogue between Israel and Europe, it must recall a thousand years of life and creation. There should be some pride involved, on all sides. History, after all, is not only a terrible burden — it is also a valuable asset.