

How the EU-NGO alliance destabilizes Jerusalem

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Jerusalem is the most complex and sensitive issue in the Arab-Israeli conflict. For over 3,000 years, the Holy City has been the focus of intense religious and national importance, as well as numerous outbreaks of violent conflict that spread across the region and the world. If this history provides any lessons, it should be the need for external parties to exercise extreme caution, and to avoid casual policy pronouncements that could easily inflame an already tense situation

Tragically, the evidence indicates that the diplomats and officials of the European Union, and some of its member states, have failed to learn any of these lessons. These officials, based primarily in east Jerusalem and Ramallah, have prepared two “policy documents” that present ill-considered analyses and very dangerous recommendations.

The EU draft documents, written between 2009 and 2011, were never presented for public debate, thus failing to follow democratic procedures that Europe preaches to others. Instead, they were strategically leaked in [Haaretz](#), [Guardian](#), and the European Observer.

To make matters worse, the claims that served as the foundation for the EU documents on Jerusalem were provided by a small number of political advocacy groups, or non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which, despite their self-identification as “non-governmental,” are funded by the governments (and taxpayers) of Europe. In the EU, budgets for political NGOs, amounting to tens of millions of euros annually, are provided through entirely secretive processes, with no information on who makes these choices or the basis for their decisions.

As the evidence shows, the EU copied much of the text and recommendations from European-funded groups such as the [Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions](#) (ICAHD), alternative archeology NGO [Emek Shaveh](#), and [Ir Amim](#). Repeating the ideological objectives of these fringe NGOs, the 2011 report claims to document “deterioration on the ground” since 2010 in Jerusalem, and repeats unsubstantiated allegations of “unjustified” house demolitions and discrimination in health and education. As in many other EU policy statements on the conflict, a simplistic picture is presented: Palestinians as victims, and Israel as the aggressor.

In particular, a section tendentiously entitled “Planning Demolition, Evictions and Displacement” in the 2011 EU document appears to be based almost entirely on ICAHD allegations from October 2011, “[No Home No Homeland: A New Normative Framework for Examining the Practice of Administrative Home Demolitions in East Jerusalem](#).” ICAHD is a marginal ideological NGO that frequently accuses Israel of “[apartheid](#),” “[ethnic cleansing](#),” and creating a “[model of terrorising](#) a civilian population into fear of resistance.”

It is bad enough that the EU funds a group whose leaders promote “one-state” policies and use demonizing rhetoric that incites hatred – the fact that this becomes the basis for policy is even worse.

While the EU/NGO reports are filled with false or misleading allegations targeting Israeli policy in Jerusalem, other basic information that contradicts this bias is entirely missing. Thus, there is no discussion of the role of the Jerusalem municipality in providing [building permits](#) for Arab residents of

Jerusalem at a level comparable to Jewish residents; in opening [post offices](#), [public clinics](#), and classrooms; in inaugurating the light rail systems, which serves both Arab and Jewish neighborhoods; and with respect to other programs for the benefit of Arab neighborhoods.

The EU, again following the lead of these fringe NGOs that are their “advisors” on Jerusalem affairs, also erased the central security context and the historical background. For instance, both EU documents regarding Jerusalem assert an “institutional and leadership vacuum in East Jerusalem created by the prolonged closure of those institutions, in particular that of the Orient House.” They erase the background to the Orient House closure in August 2001, when, as part of Israel’s defense against mass terror, including the horrific Sbarro pizzeria bombing in the center of Jerusalem, Israeli security forces found stolen weapons in the Orient House and documents proving that Palestinian officials had been operating illegally from the building.

Similarly, the EU publications and their original NGO reports largely remove the core issues related to the Temple Mount and the Waqf (the Muslim trust with authority on the Temple Mount). The controversy related to repairs to the Mughrabi Bridge (the main access point for non-Muslims) is presented in a highly misleading and partisan manner, blaming Israel alone for “exacerbat[ing] tensions” while failing to condemn extremist Islamic clerics who exploit “genuine safety concerns” as a [pretext for incitement to violence](#). The Waqf’s blatantly discriminatory ban on non-Muslim prayer on the Temple Mount is not mentioned. In parallel, the Waqf’s consistent and [clearly documented](#) violations in the area are erased.

Such absurd reports and procedures highlight the failure of European officials to exercise due diligence in verifying the factual, legal and moral claims made by these NGOs. The documents show no sign that their authors consulted with a wide range of views and sources, or that they bothered to hear the views of Israeli government and Jerusalem municipality officials, in order to at least verify the NGOs’ claims. Instead, through their allies among Israeli NGOs, the EU is attempting to force major changes in Israeli policy by circumventing democratic structures and diplomatic channels. In parallel, this small group of NGOs, under the façade of an ill-defined “civil society,” is marshaling foreign backing for positions repeatedly rejected by Israeli citizens.

If the goal of EU policy is to renew the friction, prevent the growth of peaceful cooperation and trigger renewed violence in Jerusalem, these leaked documents produced by the NGO echo chamber will help them. On the other hand, if the EU, which has more than enough problems of its own, wants to promote peace, stability and compromise, this process needs to be replaced in its entirety.

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