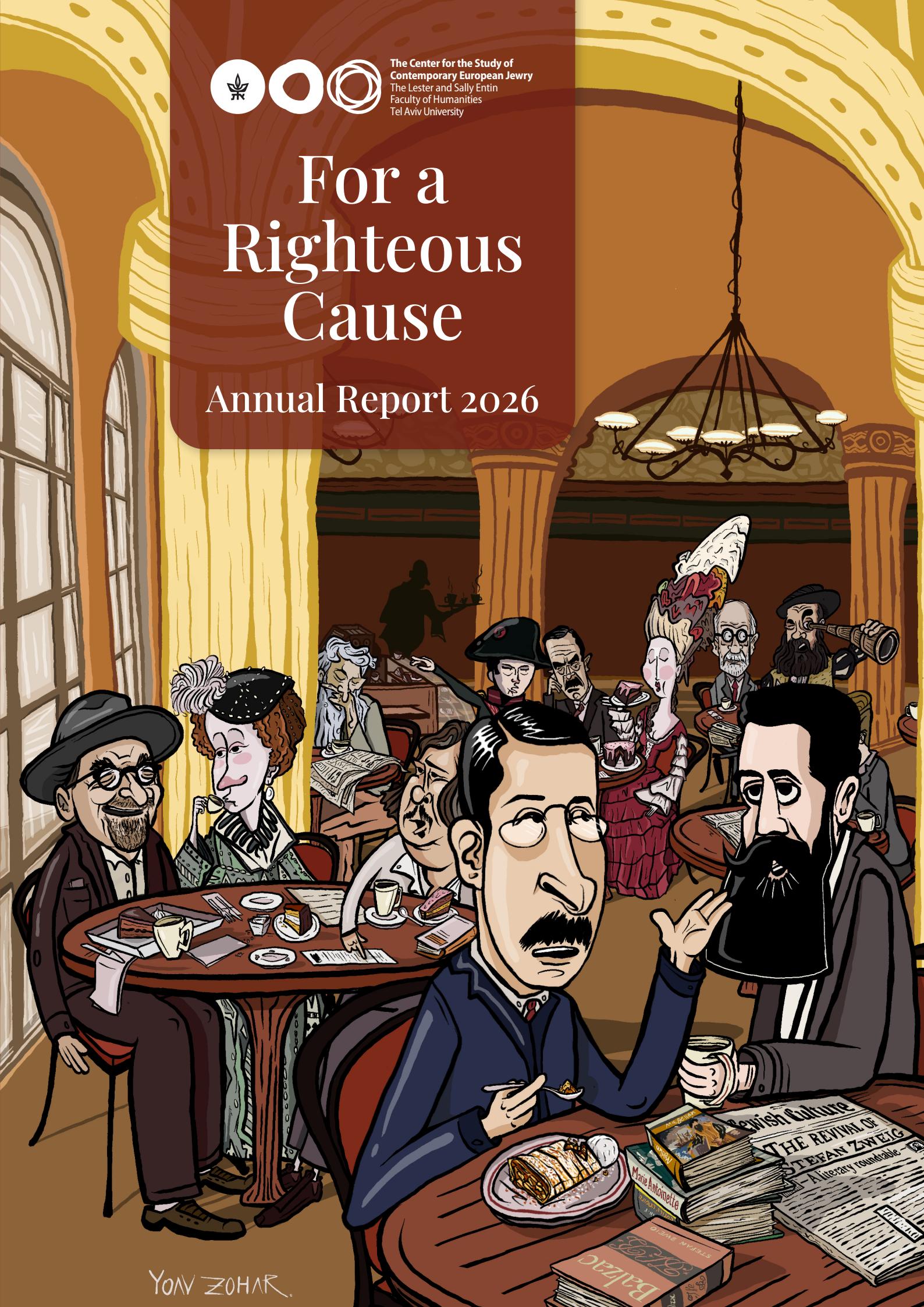




The Center for the Study of
Contemporary European Jewry
The Lester and Sally Entin
Faculty of Humanities
Tel Aviv University

For a Righteous Cause

Annual Report 2026



YONI ZOHAR.



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The Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry at Tel Aviv University supports research on Jewish history, culture and politics. Every year, the Center organizes three seminars on Jewish affairs that are open to the public, and publishes eight issues of Perspectives – analytic essays on contemporary Jewish life and thought. In cooperation with the Irwin Cotler Institute for Democracy, Human Rights and Justice, it publishes the flagship annual Antisemitism Worldwide Report.

The annual For a Righteous Cause Report, published by the Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry since 2022 on the eve of International Holocaust Remembrance Day, documents and analyzes some of year's most important developments and initiatives in the fight against antisemitism and racism at large across the world as well as projects focused on the preservation of Jewish heritage and discourses on contemporary Jewish identity. It explores educational programs, legislation, and judicial and political action with the aim to express gratitude to those who joined the righteous cause; encourage others to follow their example, and present policy proposals to improve existing programs.

A six-month team effort by experts based with the Center and beyond it, the Report relies on field observations, interviews, and diverse publications and data. It gives particular attention to initiatives in countries often overlooked by the media.

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Cover: Yoav Zohar

Graphic Design: Michal Semo Kovetz, TAU Graphic Design Studio

November 2025

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Photo by Uriya Shavit



Historical memory is like a hall of mirrors. Tokyo, The Imperial Palace, September 2025 (p. 37)

INTRODUCTION

Launched by Tel Aviv University’s Center for the Study of Contemporary Jewry in 2022, the For a Righteous Cause Report has provided an annual platform for critical discussions of programs and initiatives that preserve Jewish heritage around the world, combat racism and antisemitism, and encourage informed debates about the meaning of Jewish identity in our time. It has aimed to give public recognition to those who advance righteous causes, particularly in countries and communities that are not usually in the spotlight, encourage others to follow their examples, and offer policy proposals for the improvement of existing activities. We are proud that the Report has grown in size, scope, and influence year by year, and we thank its thousands of readers across the globe.

A main motivation for initiating the Report was the Center’s recognition of the significant place the memory of the Holocaust and the fight against antisemitism occupy in contemporary politics and culture. Since the publication of the first issue, two major crises have dominated the international arena: the aggression of fascist Russia against Ukraine and the Gaza War that followed the October 7, 2023, terror attack by Hamas against Israel. Both crises have been dotted with references to the memory of the Holocaust and antisemitism and have involved gross distortions and abuses of those terms. It appears that the more distant in time the Second World War and the Holocaust become, the greater the political role their memory plays on the world stage, highlighting the need for informed discussions about how and by whom memory is shaped.

During the war in Gaza, a number of European governments advanced particularly anti-Israel agendas, whose embrace would have landed Hamas a victory and existentially endangered Israel. The main study in this year’s Report (p. 9) analyzes why those countries have grown so distinctly more anti-Israel than others. The study is based on the analysis of dozens of opinion polls and hundreds of speeches, statements, social media posts, and opinion columns, as well as interviews with over 30 European politicians, diplomats, journalists, and scholars.

The study cautions against lazy generalizations and assumptions, showing that contrary to the conventional wisdom in Israel and beyond, the most anti-Israel countries in Europe are not the ones that are the most antisemitic or that have relatively large Muslim minorities. Rather, the most Israel-skeptical European countries have other, and perhaps surprising, common features, including their national narratives and the role of the Holocaust in those narratives.

We hope that this study will provoke much-needed debate and soul-searching and encourage Israel to consider policy changes – of which some are only a matter of budgetary prioritizing and can find broad agreement on both sides of the political aisle.

From the Czech Republic to the United States, Latvia to the United Arab Emirates, and Bulgaria to China, the Righteous Among the Nations have become a focal point of attention in the teaching of the Holocaust in recent years. The recognition of the few who risked their lives to save Jews at a time when many did evil or remained indifferent is commendable. It bestows on

the righteous and their families the admiration they deserve, and provides young people with moral examples they need. Museums and exhibitions dedicated to the Righteous Among the Nations present, however, the risk that essential and unsparing study of antisemitism and the Holocaust will be substituted by less painful and controversial tales of courage and compassion.

Our examination of this conflict has Japan as its main case study (p. 37). It explores how the meager education about the Holocaust Japanese attain has come to center around one Righteous Among the Nations diplomat, and discusses the main narratives through which Japan engages with its role in the Second World War. An intriguing question surfaces: How would Germany of today deal with its role in the war if Nazism had been just about fascism, militarism, and expansionism, but devoid of its antisemitic annihilationist essence?

With little attention outside France, President Emmanuel Macron declared in July 2025 a national day of commemoration for Alfred Dreyfus that marks what Macron described as “the victory of justice and truth against hatred and antisemitism.” Whether such a victory has indeed been fully attained is debatable. What is not is that the Dreyfus Affair still engrosses France as if it never ended. A study of the manifestations and causes of its lingering impact is revealing of the social and political challenges France faces today (p. 53).

King Charles III has shown himself committed to the preservation of the memory of the Holocaust when he visited Auschwitz in January 2025, and to the security of his Jewish subjects when he visited the Heaton Park Hebrew Congregation in Manchester in October 2025 following the antisemitic attack there, in which two Jews were killed. That commitment has deep and multiple roots in the King’s family history and his personal biography. But it may not have been as strong as it should (p. 67).

Some may be surprised to learn that new stamps are still issued in the hundreds across the globe every year. This prevailing tradition takes part in the continued construction of national narratives and is reflective of their development. A survey of stamps issued in different countries in recent years to commemorate Jewish landmarks and personalities presents an impressive and imaginative variety of images. Even those who do not collect stamps, or do not send handwritten letters anymore, may find pleasure in joining an informative and colorful journey through times and places (p. 73).

Stefan Zweig, born to an affluent Viennese Jewish family in 1882, was the most popular German-writing author of his time. While Theodor Herzl gave Zweig his first shot as a young writer, Zweig rejected Zionism. Instead, he advanced a concept of Judaism that has the world entire as its home. His literary works and correspondences were not dominated by his Jewish identity, but reveal much about the struggles, triumphs, and tragedies of European Jewry. In recent years, Zweig enjoys a renaissance in Israel. New translations of at least 20 of his works were released, and found an eager and loyal readership. The Report concludes with a roundtable discussion that explores Zweig the author and Zweig the Jew (p. 83). There is much admiration in the discussion. There is also much sorrow.

EUROPE

THE LOST CONTINENT

Since October 7, 2023, there have been marked differences between how European countries have approached the Gaza conflict. A number of European governments, which do not form a distinguishable bloc on any other issue, have taken particularly hostile stances toward Israel. These manifested in the speed of the shift of those countries from post-October 7 sympathies to harsh criticism of Israel and their positioning at the forefront of demands to penalize Israel for its Gaza policies.

The anti-Israel group included Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Slovenia, and Spain. It singled itself out as a distinctly anti-Israel voice on May 17, 2025, when it issued a joint, unequivocal statement about the need to pressure Israel more to change its policies: “We will not be silent in front of the man-made humanitarian catastrophe that is taking place before our eyes in Gaza [...] we call upon the government of Israel to immediately reverse its current policy.”¹ Belgium was a leading voice in the group until a change of government and prime minister in February 2025 moderated its criticism at a time when anti-Israel sentiments intensified almost everywhere else. The change resulted in deep frictions within its government.

The emergence of an Israel-skeptic bloc of European governments and publics (henceforth: the P-8) in the immediate aftermath of October 7, 2023, is anything but self-explanatory. Why has Slovenia become so much more critical of Israel than Croatia? Why Spain and not Portugal? Iceland and not Denmark? Norway and not Finland? Malta and not Greece? Ireland and not the United Kingdom? Belgium and not Switzerland? Luxembourg and not Austria?

Our investigation of this riddle involved data and discourse analysis as well as interviews with more than 30 European politicians, diplomats, journalists, and scholars. It cautions against easy, simplified overarching explanations as to what drives Israel-skeptic policies. It suggests that what most Israelis believe to be the core reasons for critical European agendas against their country – are not. It informs about direct links between distinct histories, present local realities, and the Middle Eastern policies taken by governments.

A word about what was at stake is in order. By the spring of 2025, Israeli military operations already ensured that the existential threat the country faced following October 7, 2023, was defeated, even if not eliminated entirely. At that point, a majority of Israelis wanted to see an end to the war, and Israel lost the support not only of a majority of Europeans, but also of the majority of the American public.

Yet a year earlier, an end to the war would have had different implications, for Israel and for the world. If the war had ended then, the leadership of Hamas would have survived, victorious.

¹ “‘We Will not Stay Silent,’ 7 European Countries Say in Response to Israeli Attacks on Gaza,” *Middle East Monitor*, May 17, 2025, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20250517-we-will-not-stay-silent-7-european-countries-say-in-response-to-israeli-attacks-on-gaza/>.

The vast majority of its *jihadists* would have remained alive and mongering. The Hamas regime would have been kept completely intact, preparing for the next round, with hundreds of millions of admirers recognizing that it was able to defeat the Zionists where far superior forces have failed.

Since its foundation at the start of the first Intifada in 1987, Hamas unequivocally and consistently opposed a two-state solution, leaving no room, not even theoretically, for a peaceful territorial compromise. Liberal Europe, which considers the two-state formula as the only just and enduring resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, should have been the first to demand and act for the destruction of the Islamist group. It never did, not really.

Hamas could at no point hope to match Israel's military strength. It was, however, wise in identifying its soft spots, and those of the liberal West. On the side of Israel, the extreme sensitivity of its citizenry to hostages – even more so in the case of soldiers than civilians. On the side of the liberal West, the sensitivity to civilian casualties. The war machine Hamas built aimed at those soft spots: to bring Israel to its knees by taking a large number of hostages, and then tie its hands through the cynical, cold-blooded usage of Palestinian civilians as human shields and total indifference to their well-being.

When historians analyze the Gaza war in a hundred years from now, they will probably argue that the main strategic mistake by Hamas on October 7, 2023, was that it could not overcome its sadistic thirst for Jewish blood. Had Hamas settled for the killing and kidnapping of soldiers, Israel would still have *casus belli*, but may not have had an American and a majority-European carte blanche to storm Gaza in 2023 and 2024 the way it did.

Yet if the wheel of world diplomacy had been stirred by the P-8 European states, Israel may well have been forced to stop short of crushing Hamas in 2023-2024, despite the war crimes the Islamist group had committed and its continued declared determination to seek Israel's annihilation. During the early months of the war, that is, when the United States and the major European powers still stood by Israel, statements and gestures by P-8 leaders harshly condemned Hamas, yet at the same time compared its war crimes to the actions taken by the IDF and practically pressured Israel to end its military operations with the Islamist regime fully and victoriously in power.

For example, already a week after the October 7 attack, then Spanish Social Rights Minister Ione Belarra stated that Israel was conducting a “genocide attempt” in Gaza. The Spanish Foreign Ministry defended the legitimacy of her statement.² Also within a week of October 7, Luxembourg's Minister for Foreign and European Affairs, Jean Asselborn, issued a statement in which, alongside a strong condemnation of Hamas and a call for the unconditional release of the hostages, he called for de-escalation and the immediate cessation of hostilities and expressed

² “Israel Says Some Spanish Officials Align with Hamas, Government Rejects,” Reuters, October 16, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-says-some-spanish-officials-align-with-hamas-government-rejects-2023-10-16/>.



Pro-Palestinian demonstration in Logrono, La Rioja, Spain, October 4, 2025

concerns about the humanitarian situation created by Israel's military actions.³ Not a month went by since the war began, and the Icelandic parliament issued a condemnation of Hamas and in the same breath a condemnation of "all subsequent actions of the Israeli government in violation of international humanitarian law, including untold suffering, loss of life, civilian casualties and destruction of civilian infrastructure,"⁴ while the Belgian government questioned, alongside its condemnation of Hamas, the legality of some Israeli airstrikes, condemned what it termed the Israeli collective punishment of the Palestinian population, and called for targeted sanctions and accountability for those responsible.⁵ Less than two months into the start of the war, while visiting Israel, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez and his Belgian counterpart, Alexander De Croo, lauded the temporary cease-fire in the Gaza Strip and called for it to be made permanent, *de facto* asking to impose defeat on Israel.⁶

³ The Luxembourg Government, "Statement by Minister Jean Asselborn Regarding the Situation in Gaza following the Terrorist Attacks by Hamas," [gouvernement.lu](https://gouvernement.lu/en/actualites/toutes_actualites/communiques/2023/10-octobre/13-asselborn-gaza.html), October 13, 2023, https://gouvernement.lu/en/actualites/toutes_actualites/communiques/2023/10-octobre/13-asselborn-gaza.html.

⁴ Government of Iceland, "Conflict in the Middle East: Iceland's Response," [government.is](https://www.government.is/topics/foreign-affairs/conflict-in-the-middle-east/), November 9, 2023, <https://www.government.is/topics/foreign-affairs/conflict-in-the-middle-east/>.

⁵ Claudio Francavilla, "Belgium Overcomes EU Struggles to Send Strong Message on Gaza," Human Rights Watch, November 16, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/16/belgium-overcomes-eu-struggles-send-strong-message-gaza>.

⁶ Eric Sylvers, "Spain and Belgium Leaders Call for Permanent Ceasefire in Gaza," *Wall Street Journal*, November 24, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/livecoverage/israel-hamas-war-gaza-strip-2023-11-21/card/spain-and-belgium-leaders-call-for-permanent-cease-fire-in-gaza-003ZwnBxVpWZ2hggykS3>.

Four months into the war, in February 2024 (when thousands of Gazan civilians had already been killed), the Prime Ministers of Spain and Ireland, Pedro Sánchez and Leo Varadkar, implored EU leaders to take action over the situation in Gaza and demanded an immediate assessment of whether Israel is complying with human rights obligations that are stipulated in its trade deal with the bloc. They noted that they “are deeply concerned at the deteriorating situation in Israel and in Gaza, especially the impact the ongoing conflict is having on innocent Palestinians, especially children and women.”⁷ The same month, the Foreign Minister of Malta, Ian Borg, called shortly before his country assumed the rotating presidency of the United Nations Security Council, for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza. He vigorously condemned the October 7 massacre, yet noted that Palestinian civilians should not be killed because of it.⁸

In May 2024, Spain, Ireland, and Norway became the first European countries since the start of the war to recognize Palestine as a state, followed by Slovenia the next month (Iceland offered a similar recognition already in November 2011; it was followed by Sweden in 2014). The symbolic recognitions were intended as a show of support for the two-state solution,⁹ but served as a means to pressure Israel to end the war in Gaza. The statements that accompanied them failed to explain how a two-state solution and just peace could ever be achieved if Hamas remained in power. In January 2024, Slovenia supported the genocide case against Israel that South Africa submitted to the International Court of Justice. Spain followed suit in June 2024; Ireland in January 2025.

During 2024, the United Nations’ General Assembly voted 17 times on Israel-related issues. Israel-specific issues preoccupied the biased General Assembly more than those of any other state in the world, and similar to all of them combined. The voting coincidence of P-8 countries with the pro-Israel United States (with which Israel had a 90% voting coincidence) was almost as low as that of anti-Israel countries such as Pakistan and Turkey (and, in the case of Malta, was astonishingly even worse): 17% in the case of Belgium, Iceland, Ireland, and Norway, 13% for Luxembourg, Slovenia, and Spain, and 7% for Malta.¹⁰

Where data are available, they suggest that the hostile approach to Israel of P-8 countries aligned with public opinions. According to YouGov, in May 2024, as well as in May 2025, the

⁷ Lisa O’Carroll, “Ireland and Spain Demand EU Reviews Israel Trade Deal over Rights Obligations,” *The Guardian*, February 14, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/feb/14/ireland-and-spain-demand-eu-reviews-israel-trade-deal-over-rights-obligations>.

⁸ Burak Bir, “Now Is the Time for a Permanent Ceasefire in Gaza: Maltese Foreign Minister,” *Anadolu Agency*, February 18, 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/now-is-the-time-for-permanent-cease-fire-in-gaza-maltese-foreign-minister/3140839#>.

⁹ Rob Picheta, “Spain, Ireland and Norway Have Recognized Palestinian Statehood. Where Does Europe Stand on the Issue?” *CNN*, May 28, 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/05/28/middleeast/spain-ireland-norway-recognize-palestinian-statehood-intl>; Government of Norway, “Recognition of Palestine – Statement by Norway,” *regjeringen.no*, May 22, 2024, <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/9eee5896be514763a83199eeb51c6d40/recognitionofpalestinestatementbynorway.pdf>.

¹⁰ Department of State, “Report to Congress on Voting Practices in the United Nations for 2024,” *state.gov*, July 2025, pp. 71-80, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Voting-Practices-in-the-United-Nations-for-2024.pdf>.

net favorability of Israel in Spain was as low as -55,¹¹ while Pew Research found in the spring of 2025 that 75% of the Spanish public viewed Israel negatively.¹² In Iceland, in the fall of 2024, 72.5% of the public sympathized more with the Palestinians than with Israel. A mere 9.5% expressed the opposite sentiment, with 53.6% demanding a severing of diplomatic relations.¹³ In Ireland, a survey (highly-biasedly phrased) conducted three months after the October 7 attack found that 71% of the public holds that the Palestinians live under an apartheid system.¹⁴ Philippe Poirier, a political scientist from the University of Luxembourg who has been tracking attitudes toward Jews and Israel in the Grand Duchy for the past decade, suggested that by 2025, some 80% of the population identified more with the Palestinians than with Israel.¹⁵ Roger Strickland, the Honorary Consul of Israel (and the Philippines) in Malta, a Catholic and offspring of a legendary Maltese prime minister, informed that public opinion in the country has turned overwhelmingly against Israel. “I tell people here, thank God we have Israel to protect the Eastern Mediterranean. Maltese don’t really sympathize with this. They look at me and they say: ‘Are you crazy?’ The younger generation, I think, is 100% on the Palestinian side. I have a 22-year-old daughter who is a lawyer, and she refuses to talk to me about Israel and my role as honorary consul. Her friends are all on the same page.”¹⁶

Is it antisemitism? The most immediate explanation for the intensity of P-8 criticism against Israel blames antisemitism. It is a favorite of Israeli politicians because it provides an ultimate and overarching defense of Israeli policies.

The linkage between antisemitism and a political climate that applies double standards to Israel makes sense, regardless of which is the chicken and which is the egg. However, as an explanation for P-8 diplomatic conduct, it is extremely weak.

As readers of this Center’s publications know, antisemitism is a tricky concept to define, and has become trickier in recent years. It is obvious why hatred directed verbally or physically against Jews as individuals, communities, or as a people because of their Jewish identity is antisemitism. It is also obvious that harsh criticism of Israel, even if misinformed, is not antisemitism. It is, however, difficult in some cases to credibly determine when double standards applied against the State of the Jews, or delegitimizations of the right of the State of the Jews to exist, are clear-cut antisemitism. The risk of cyclicity is ever-present: labelling criticism of Israel as antisemitism and then explaining antisemitism as the reason for the criticism.

¹¹ Mathew Smith, Head of Data Journalism, YouGov, “Net Favorability towards Israel Reaches New Lows in Key Western European Countries,” YouGov, June 3, 2025, <https://yougov.co.uk/international/articles/52279-net-favourability-towards-israel-reaches-new-lows-in-key-western-european-countries>.

¹² Laura Silver, “Most People across 24 Surveyed Countries Have Negative Views of Israel and Netanyahu,” Pew Research Center, June 3, 2025, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/06/03/most-people-across-24-surveyed-countries-have-negative-views-of-israel-and-netanyahu/>.

¹³ Jelena Ciric, “Majority of Icelanders Sympathetic to Palestinian Cause,” *Iceland Review*, October 2024, https://www.icelandreview.com/news/majority-of-icelanders-sympathetic-to-palestinian-cause/?srsltid=AfmB0ool-BrcexNSLMQoP8X6a5FO1gTONGvmsAomavpO98Sz4_oJ1XTi.

¹⁴ Amnesty International, “New Poll Shows an Overwhelming Majority of Irish People Believe Palestinians Live Under an Israeli Apartheid System,” amnesty.ie, January 18, 2024, <https://www.amnesty.ie/israeli-apartheid-poll/>.

¹⁵ Interview by the authors, August 28, 2025.

¹⁶ Interview by the authors, August 21, 2025.

Yet, whichever criteria are applied, none of the P-8 countries shine, in comparative European perspective, as particularly antisemitic.

To be sure, the overall trend has been of an increase in antisemitism following October 7, 2023, also in some P-8 countries. Antisemitisme.be, a nongovernmental organization that records antisemitic incidents in Belgium, reported an increase from a record 117 antisemitic incidents in 2023 to a new record of 129 in 2024.¹⁷ In Spain, the Observatorio de Antisemitismo en España, established in 2009 by the Federation of Jewish Communities of Spain (FCJE), recorded 170 incidents in 2024 compared to 60 in 2023 and 35 in 2022.¹⁸ In Norway, the average annual number of anti-Jewish crimes recorded by the police more than doubled in 2023 to 50, while declining to 45 in 2024.¹⁹ In 2023, the nongovernmental organization Research and Information on Antisemitism in Luxembourg (RIAL) reported the occurrence of 105 antisemitic incidents compared to 65 in 2022. Seventy of these involved verbal abuse in connection to the war in Gaza.²⁰

Still, the trend of an increase in antisemitic incidents was not different, and in some cases was more pronounced, in countries that vigorously supported Israel during the early phases of the war, including Germany and Austria in Europe, and Argentina in South America.²¹ Moreover, with the exception of Norway, Jewish organizations and activists in P-8 countries have not reported in recent years a sense of growing insecurity due to antisemitic attacks or complained about governmental indifference to their concerns. In our conversation, the Executive Director of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Spain, Carolina Aisen, emphasized the good communication of the communities with law enforcement agencies,²² and cautioned against exaggerated evaluations of the scope of antisemitic threats in the country.²³ The newly-appointed Chief Rabbi of Madrid, Moisés Chicurel, shared a similar sentiment in an interview with the Haredi newspaper *Yated Neeman*. He said that he had never faced any hostility while walking around Madrid visibly identifiable as Jewish, and praised the local and national police forces for their protection of the community.²⁴ In Antwerp, where about two-thirds of Belgium's Jews live, members of the Jewish community noted the city as a positive exception to the general trend of antisemitism in Europe.²⁵

¹⁷ Antisemitisme.Be, “Antisemitism in Belgium – Annual Report 2024 [French],” antisemitisme.be, 2025, p. 3, <https://cdn.sanity.io/files/kyuaifoy/production/67ca292bcee4cb4334e26d6e6a6d5d88191d0023.pdf>.

¹⁸ The Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry and the Irwin Cotler Institute for Democracy, Human Rights and Justice, *Antisemitism Worldwide Report for 2024*, April 2025, p. 25, https://cst.tau.ac.il/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/AntisemitismWorldwide_2024.pdf.

¹⁹ Norwegian Police, “Hate Crimes in Norway [Norwegian],” politiet.no, May 2025, p. 32, <https://www.politiet.no/globalassets/dokumenter-strategier-og-horinger/oslo/rapporter/hatkriminalitet-norge/hatkriminalitet-i-norge---arsrapport-2024.pdf>.

²⁰ Department of State, “Luxembourg 2023 International Religious Freedom Report,” state.gov, March 2024, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/547499-LUXEMBOURG-2023-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>.

²¹ The Center and the Irwin Cotler Institute, *Antisemitism Worldwide Report for 2024*, pp. 19, 21-22, 25.

²² Ibid., p. 25.

²³ Conversation with Prof. Uriya Shavit and Dr. Carl Yonker, October 1, 2024.

²⁴ N. Markovitz, “The Diplomatic Inquisition [Hebrew],” *Yated Neeman*, September 29, 2025, p. 68.

²⁵ Israel Rosner, “Hate Graffiti Found on the Wall of the Great Synagogue in Antwerp [Hebrew],” *Yated Neeman*, August 19, 2025, p. 22.

One reason why the number of antisemitic attacks in P-8 countries is relatively small is that their Jewish populations are relatively small. Of the eight, only Belgium has a significant number of Jewish citizens, almost 30,000, although even there they comprise approximately only 0.25% of the population. In Iceland, Malta and Slovenia, there are only several dozen Jews respectively, in Luxembourg about 1,200 according to the more generous estimations, in Norway, some 1,500, and in Ireland, approximately 3,000. In Spain, Jews comprise less than 0.1% of the population.

However, also on the notional-abstract level, there is no evidence to suggest that the publics in P-8 countries hold distinctly deep-seated hateful or prejudiced views against Jews that drive their governments to adopt agendas that are hostile to Israel. None of the P-8 countries has a political party with a past or a present of expressly antisemitic views as a significant political force. Those of the P-8 included in recent surveys about public attitudes towards Jews have not emerged as more antisemitic than several of the most pro-Israel countries in Europe.

The Global Index on antisemitism published by the Anti-Defamation League highlights the share of respondents who answered “definitely true” or “probably true” to six or more of what it defines as 11 negative stereotypes about Jews. The Index published in early 2025 found Norway to have one of the lowest scores, with only 8% of respondents identifying with the majority of antisemitic falsehoods, compared to 49% in Eastern Europe and 24% in the Americas (and 97% in the West Bank and Gaza).²⁶ The survey released in 2023 showed that while Spain (26%) and Belgium (22%) scored higher than non-P-8 West European countries surveyed, including France (15%) and Germany (12%), they scored lower than the most pro-Israel country in the European Union, Hungary (37%), as well as lower than Poland (35%).²⁷

A comparative survey by the Pew Research Center from 2018 of 15 European countries showed publics in Norway (95%) and Belgium (89%) to have particularly high contention rates with a prospect of Jews as members of their families. The shares in Ireland (70%) and Spain (79%) were lower – but still higher than in the pro-Israel Germany and Austria. They were also higher than the shares of respondents in Ireland and Spain who were content with having a Muslim as a member of the family (60% in Ireland, 74% in Spain).²⁸ Significant minorities in Spain, Belgium, and Norway agreed with the statements that Jews overstate their historical suffering and pursue their own interests rather than those of the countries where they live, but so was the case for Italy and Portugal, and to a lesser extent for Austria, Germany, Switzerland, and France.²⁹

A long but crucial digression: There developed fatigue in Europe about what some hold to be the simplification, overstretching, and politicization of the fight against antisemitism. The problem is that the fatigue involves not only conscious antisemites, but also people who are

²⁶ ADL, “46% of Adults Worldwide Hold Significant Antisemitic Beliefs, ADL Poll Finds,” [adl.org](https://adl.org/resources/press-release/46-adults-worldwide-hold-significant-antisemitic-beliefs-adl-poll-finds), January 14, 2025, <https://www.adl.org/resources/press-release/46-adults-worldwide-hold-significant-antisemitic-beliefs-adl-poll-finds>.

²⁷ ADL, “The ADL Global 100: An Index of Antisemitism,” [adl.org](https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/2023-05/ADL-Global100-2023_1.pdf), May 2023 https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/2023-05/ADL-Global100-2023_1.pdf.

²⁸ Pew Research Center, “Being Christian in Western Europe,” [pewforum.org](https://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2018/05/Being-Christian-in-Western-Europe-FOR-WEB1.pdf), May 29, 2018, p. 64, <https://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2018/05/Being-Christian-in-Western-Europe-FOR-WEB1.pdf>.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 74.

highly critical of Israel but are not antisemites, as well as long-time friends of Israel and the Jewish people. It injures the prospects for informed dialogues that can clear misunderstandings, and it risks hurting the struggle against the actual and dangerous growth in old-fashioned Jew-hatred across the world.

Reverend Prof. Stefan Attard, the Dean of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Malta, still remembers fondly the four months he spent at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem more than twenty years ago. “You see everything. The people you meet, the cultures, the museums, the sites, every day something was happening.” A suicide attack on a bus he witnessed left its mark. “When you are there, you do get the Israeli perspective. When you are not, well, then you might just hear of some kind of explosion that happened.”³⁰

On June 26, 2025, the Senate of Attard’s university issued a strong condemnation of Israel’s policies in Gaza. “These recurring breaches of international law, cumulatively amounting to ethnic cleansing and genocide, can under no circumstances be explained as self-defense,” the statement read.³¹

Attard embraced us with fatherly priestly warmth in his office two months later, together with members of his faculty. “I always get the feeling that when it comes to the discourse on antisemitism, there’s too much of this rhetoric,” he said. “Like, you get the impression that Israelis, and Jews, are automatically, by default, seeing themselves as being victims of persecution, victims of antisemitism, and so on. Of course, this is coming from real instances of such cases. But then, when the rhetoric is constantly [about antisemitism], I think it has an adverse effect.”³²

Dr. George Vital Zammit, a political scientist from the same university, opened our conversation aggressively: “Let me start by clarifying something important. I do not agree that there is antisemitism in the countries you are studying,” he said, before being asked about the topic. “For me, criticizing Netanyahu is not antisemitism, just as criticizing Putin for the war in Ukraine does not make someone anti-Russian. Western leaders, when faced with images of destruction in Gaza, will inevitably voice criticism. This is a political reaction, not a cultural or religious prejudice.”³³

Yves Cruchten, 50, is a senior member of parliament for the Socialist Party of Luxembourg (LSAP) that is currently in the opposition. One of his colleagues described him to us as “mega anti-Israel.” He called for the suspension of the trade agreement between the EU and Israel.

On a pleasant summer day, the bearded and soft-spoken Cruchten, a former Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, welcomed us at his office in the center of Luxembourg City in short pants and a warm smile. He emphasized outright his condemnation of the October 7 attack and that his criticism of Israel’s response was never against the Israeli people but against their government. “Of course [Israel] had to react. Of course [Israel] had to protect [its] population.

³⁰ Interview by the authors, August 20, 2025.

³¹ Nicole Meilak, “University of Malta Senate Condemns Israel’s War in Gaza,” *Malta Today*, June 28, 2025, <https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/national/135641/universitySenateCondemnsIsraelsWarInGaza>.

³² Interview by the authors, August 20, 2025.

³³ Interview by the authors, August 20, 2025.



Palestine Cola in Luxembourg City (left) and Pro-Palestinian graffiti in Valletta (right), August 2025

[It had] to make sure that things like October 7 never, never, never happen again, and to punish those who have committed those crimes. It was obvious that there [would have to be] a strong response, a military response. I don't say that [what happened in the war] is totally wrong, but between the [initial] reaction and what [happened later], I think we were in another situation.”³⁴

Cruchten stressed it was unjust to describe him as antisemitic because of his conviction that Israel was committing war crimes. “You shouldn't be labeled as such; you should not be put with the worst of the worst, only because you are critical of the Israeli government. That is something that hurts me big time. I just spoke two weeks ago with a rabbi about this, and he understood me. He said, ‘Yeah, I feel you.’ The problem is that the definition we have for antisemitism, the IHRA definition, you can put so many things [under it].”³⁵

Is it Muslim migration? The equally popular explanation for P-8 hostility to Israel highlights the influence of Muslims across the continent. The argument, often preached with an unconcealed sense of schadenfreude, is that Europe has been “taken over” by Muslim migrants, who change its character and, among other impacts, push its political leaderships to anti-Israel positions.

³⁴ Interview by the authors, August 25, 2025.

³⁵ Ibid.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu expressed this sentiment explicitly in his Sparta Speech in September 2025. He said that “limitless migration” has resulted in Muslims becoming a “significant minority – very vocal, very, very belligerent.” He claimed that Muslim citizens are pressuring European governments to adopt anti-Israel policies.³⁶

The generalizing and ever-casual way labels are put on “Muslim migrants” would have had Israeli officials cry out, and rightly so, about antisemitism had such statements been applied against Jews. Attributing European governments’ stance on the war in Gaza to the influence of Muslim minorities is misleading in two ways: there did not develop in Europe, on continental or national levels, a unified religious-grounded “Muslim vote”; and the political impact of citizens of Muslim faith in Europe has remained, to date, marginal – including in the majority of P-8 countries.

Not all Muslims across the continent contextualize their identity primarily through religion, and the majority of those who do, do so through a plethora of ethnic-national and ideological frameworks that reflect contesting interpretations of Islam. There are no European or state-level Islamic institutions that advance communal political goals. The emergence of a religio-legal corpus on Muslim minorities that described voting as a religious duty and tied that duty to assisting Muslim causes globally had not led in any European country to the rise of communal shari‘a-based electoral powerbrokers whose instructions are heeded. With rare anecdotal exceptions, all attempts to establish political parties with Islamist agendas ended with embarrassing failures, including when running in districts with significant Muslim minorities. Few politicians of Muslim faith have made it to top positions in European governments, and those who did were not religiously radical, if religious at all.

Already before October 7, statements of support for the Palestinian cause and collections of donations for Gaza were commonplace during Friday congregational prayers in European mosques. Yet for a variety of reasons, including fears of the reactions of police and intelligence agencies, mosque leaderships tend to moderate the tone when broaching explicit political issues. As strange as this may sound, mosques provide a safer environment for Israelis than certain university campuses.

The share of Muslims in Europe has steadily grown since the 1980s, with the more generous estimations putting it in EU countries at approximately six percent. Still, residence should not be confused with citizenship, and only the latter provides a right to vote in national elections. Excluding non-naturalized refugees and others, the actual number of Muslims who have a political say in Europe is significantly smaller than their shares of different national populations.

Minority voters in Europe do not hold the national-level political sway they potentially hold in the United States. In Michigan in 2024, Kamala Harris underperformed President Biden in 2020

³⁶ Nava Freiberg and Lazar Berman, “Netanyahu Admits Israel Economically Isolated, Says Will Need to Become ‘Super-Sparta,’” *Times of Israel*, September 15, 2025, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-admits-israel-is-economically-isolated-will-need-to-become-self-reliant/>.

in part because of protest votes regarding their administration's Gaza policy³⁷ (although it is far from obvious that Harris would have won Michigan even if a war in Gaza had not broken out, and would have anyhow lost the elections even if she had won that state). The importance of the Muslim (and Christian-Arab) vote in Michigan is, however, a product of the unique and distorting American electoral college system: A swing state where every tiny electoral group has the capacity to determine the outcome for the entire Union. There is no equivalent of that distortion in Europe, including where variations of the first-past-the-post system are applied.

If the presence of Muslim citizens was a key factor in governments' taking a harsh anti-Israel stance, one would expect to see at least some correlation between the share of Muslims in the national populations, their political impact, and the direction of Middle Eastern policies. However, the opposite is the case.

Six of the P-8 countries have negligible Muslim minorities or ones that are smaller than the European average. In Iceland, the European country that has become the most steadfast in opposition to Israel's policies, approximately only 1% of the population is Muslim. Only a minority of those Muslims attends one of the three mosques in the capital Reykjavik in the viciously divided Islamic scene that developed in the country, and that has distinguished itself more for petty internal struggles than for common action.³⁸

In Spain, slightly less than 5% of the population is Muslim, but no more than half of the Muslims have citizenship.³⁹ One member of the current government, Sira Abed Rego, was born in Valencia to a Spanish mother and a Palestinian father. A member of the European Parliament since 2019, she was nominated Minister of Youth and Children in November 2023, despite addressing the October 7 massacre by emphasizing the right of the Palestinians to resist Israel.⁴⁰ Other than her, only one politician known to be Muslim has ascended on the national stage, although for a short time – Muhammad Chaib Akhdim, of Moroccan descent, who served in parliament representing the Socialists' Party of Catalonia in 2018-2019. Only a few Muslim politicians left an imprint on regional-level politics. "The left-wing parties have not been successful in incorporating Muslim candidates, even though they often speak in favor of inclusion. There is a kind of symbolic multiculturalism, but when it comes to real representation, it remains almost absent," said Pablo Biderbost, a political scientist from the University of Salamanca.⁴¹

In Slovenia, the share of Muslims is less than 3% of the population, and most are from Bosnia and Albania. No member of the parliament is known to be Muslim.

³⁷ Tim Perkins, "They Blew It": Democrats Lost 22,000 Votes in Michigan's Heavily Arab American Cities," *The Guardian*, November 9, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/nov/09/democrats-lose-michigan-arab-american-voters>.

³⁸ On the history and frictions of Islam in Iceland: Uriya Shavit and Fabian Spengler, *Shar'ia and Life: Authority, Compromise and Mission in European Mosques* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2023), pp. 81-92.

³⁹ Union De Comunidades Islamicas De Espana, "Demographic Study of the Muslim Population [Spanish]," observatorio.hispanomuslim.es, December 31, 2024, p. 16, <http://observatorio.hispanomuslim.es/estademograf.pdf>.

⁴⁰ Gabe Friedman, "Spanish Politician Who on October 7 Said Palestinians Had 'Right to Resist' Is Made a Cabinet Minister," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, November 20, 2023, <https://www.jta.org/2023/11/20/global/spanish-politician-who-on-oct-7-said-palestinians-have-right-to-resist-is-made-a-cabinet-minister>.

⁴¹ Interview by Antonio Peña, September 18, 2025.

In Malta, Muslims comprise approximately 4% of the population (the percentage of citizens is smaller). “We don’t have a Muslim vote here,” said Honorary Consul Strickland. “It has absolutely no relevance whatsoever.”⁴² No member of the Maltese parliament is known to be Muslim.

In Ireland, Muslims comprise approximately 2% of the population – a sharp increase from a decade ago, yet they are still a small minority, and a highly ethnically diverse one that lacks political weight. Not a single member of the current Irish parliament is a Muslim.

In Luxembourg, Muslims comprised approximately 3% of the population four years ago, though their share of the population may have increased recently.⁴³ “The Muslim community has grown lately because of many refugees that we have taken in, but it is still a small community. It has no electoral power. It is not an organized community politically. If there is the fear that Muslim communities are influencing the political sphere here, I must say it is absolutely wrong,”⁴⁴ said MP Cruchten. He noted that his blunt criticism of Israel was unlikely to win him or lose him a single vote in the next elections.

Norway and Belgium stand out among P-8 countries regarding the political influence of Muslim migrants – but only just. Norway, with a population of some 5.6 million citizens, had almost 200,000 people registered in Muslim religious communities in 2025.⁴⁵ Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life projected that by 2030 the percentage of Muslims in Norway will be 6.5%.⁴⁶ The current representation of Muslims in parliament approximately reflects their share of the population, but to date, only two Norwegian Muslim citizens have made it to prominent political positions. These are Abid Raja, who served as Minister of Culture, Sports and Equality for almost two years in 2020-2021, and Hadia Tajik. Born to parents who migrated from Pakistan, she served in 2012 as Minister of Culture for a year, and a decade later as Minister of Labor and Social Inclusion for half a year. On October 8, 2023, Tajik posted a condemnation of Hamas, albeit far from a strongly worded one.⁴⁷

In Belgium, Muslims account for approximately 7% of the population. In the capital Brussels, as many as one-fifth of the residents are Muslim. The number of representatives who are known to be Muslim in the current parliament is close to their share of the population. Muslim voters ushered in the electoral rise of the Marxist-leaning and anti-Zionist “The Workers Party of Belgium,” which currently holds 10% of the seats in parliament. It is in the opposition, yet its strong anti-Israel views pressure more mainstream socialists who compete for the same votes, including the Flemish social democrats (Vooruit), who are in the current coalition, to escalate their rhetoric against Israel. Still, Belgian Marxists did not need the encouragement of Muslims to present a strongly-worded agenda against Israel and the United States; and

⁴² Interview by the authors, August 21, 2025.

⁴³ “Religions in Luxembourg.” Luxtoday, July 27, 2025, <https://luxtoday.lu/en/knowledge/religion-in-luxembourg>.

⁴⁴ Interview by the authors, August 25, 2025.

⁴⁵ Statistics Norway, “Religious Communities and Life Stance Communities,” ssb.no, June 11, 2025, <https://www.ssb.no/en/kultur-og-fritid/religion-og-livssyn/statistikk/trus-og-livssynssamfunn-utanfor-den-norske-kyrkja>.

⁴⁶ Pew Research Center, *The Future of the Global Muslim Population*, January 2011, p. 162.

⁴⁷ Hadia Tajik (@hadiatajik.nno), “Hamas Has Launched a Terrorist Attack against Israel... [Norwegian],” Facebook, October 8, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/hadiatajik.no/posts/hamas-har-med-sitt-terrorangrep-mot-israel-gjort-livet-meir-utrygt-b%C3%A5de-for-isra/898385651658982/>.

Belgium is the only one of the P-8 countries that shifted toward a more balanced approach regarding the conflict as the war in Gaza progressed.

What is it, then? Our study identified six aspects that are common to the P-8 countries and encouraged particularly hostile approaches to Israel since October 7, 2023. None of these aspects independently explains the intensity of anti-Israel views and policies there, yet their accumulation might. None is unique to the P-8 countries in the European context, yet their combination and depth is.

These are: (a) left-oriented coalition governments; (b) the minimal role of antisemitism and Holocaust remembrance in political discourse; (c) national narratives receptive to identification with the Palestinian cause; (d) pre-existence of deep-seated anti-Israel views; (e) the meager international and national implications of diplomatic decisions regarding the Middle East; and (f) modest scopes of pro-Israel public diplomacy.

European socialists and other left-leaning parties are distinctly more critical of Israel than conservative and populist ones. Their dominance of governing coalitions in the majority of P-8 countries is one explanation why those countries adopted a vigorous anti-Israel line during the war.

Of the P-8, leftist, left-center, or broad coalitions led by leftist politicians have been in power during the war in Spain, Ireland, Iceland, Malta, Norway, and Slovenia. Ireland elected in October 2025 by a landslide 63% a radical leftist and particularly anti-Israel politician, Catherine Connolly, as its new President, a ceremonial role.

Belgium and Luxembourg are exceptions that do not disprove the rule. Belgium had seen since 2020 coalitions led by the center-right. In Luxembourg, a coalition alliance of greens, socialists, and liberals was replaced in 2023 by a coalition led by the conservatives and joined by the centrist liberals. However, in neither country was a strictly conservative or conservative-populist coalition formed. In Belgium, a shift towards a more conservative coalition in January 2025 (albeit not a strictly conservative one) resulted in a change of approach favoring Israel. In both, the governments would have been far more hostile to Israel had the left been in power.

There are a number of reasons for the leftist anti-Israel bent. One is that Israeli politics have been dominated for almost half a century by conservative coalitions, and since 2022, by a coalition with a distinct radical-religious and populist bent. The priorities and the political vocabulary of Israeli officials have become alienating for left-leaning European politicians. The more that disparity brought Israel closer to European conservatism and populism, the more the chasm with Israel became a defining feature in European domestic politics. Some leftist European activists and leaders, who in their youth grew up on the ethos of Israel as a socialist utopia and a sheep overcoming wolves, and even experienced the utopia firsthand as volunteers on kibbutzim, have grown personally frustrated and angry with what has become of it. Post-Six Day War Israel is a personal broken dream for them.

Another reason are the expectations from Israel as democracy and a close European partner to maintain certain human rights standards, and the sense of some leftist European politicians that in the case of Israel, unlike that of countries that are more distant from the European system,

criticism can actually make a difference. Asked why he has been so much more vociferous against Israel than against other countries that do not uphold his standards of human rights, Luxembourgian MP Cruchten told us: “We see Israel as a Western country that shares a lot of our values. And therefore it is even twice more painful to see it committing crimes against humanity.” When asked why he had never called for trade sanctions against other countries with far from unblemished records on human rights, for example, China, a crucial economic partner of Luxembourg, there was a long silence, after which Cruchten replied in a way untypical of politicians: “I have no answer to that. It’s a difficult one. I understand that. It’s a very legitimate question.” After some more contemplation, he added: “We have to also be critical of China, but China is not starving children at the moment.”⁴⁸

Yet another reason for the anti-Israel bent is that the emphasis put by European leftists on human rights has been receptive to and distorted by critical theories, primarily those imported from American academia, that see weakness and victimhood as inherent representatives of justice, and power and affluence as inherent representatives of injustice. While guided by the intention to expose the hidden interests and structures that shape politics and human relations at large, these theories have ironically demonstrated a tendency to lead to one-dimensional analyses of social and political phenomena. Seeing Israel as the ultimate villain no matter what is one such one-dimensional analysis.

The anti-Israel leftist bent in Europe owes in part also to the roots of some members of leftist parties in Marxist movements, including such that have historical links with Palestinian groups, and their lingering anti-American sentiments. That some of Europe’s biggest supporters of Putin’s fascist Russia’s unprovoked war and crimes against humanity in Ukraine also happen to be the biggest antagonists of Israel speaks for itself. Their passion is not for human rights as a universal concept, but for seeing a weakened United States; not for the improvement of the liberal international system, but for its total destruction.

Spain, the largest of the P-8, has been governed by the most radical leftist coalition of the group. “The Spanish left has always been deeply anti-American, against NATO and the US bases. Israel has been seen as Washington’s outpost in the Middle East, while Palestine became the anti-imperialist cause. The left in Spain speaks about Israel through symbols – imperialism, resistance – but without concrete proposals. It’s more about identity than policy,” said Manuel Jesús García Martín, former provincial executive with the Spanish Socialists’ Workers Party (PSOE).⁴⁹ Daniel Fernández de Miguel, scholar of contemporary history at Universidad Complutense de Madrid, explained: “Spain’s current government is the most left-wing in Europe. [Its anti-Israel policy was designed] to demonstrate independence from Washington and the Western bloc, so it aligned with the Global South and Arab countries.”⁵⁰

The fragile base of the governing coalition in Madrid helped fuel those long-existing sentiments. “The current government was trying to divert attention from domestic problems and build an international image that would help its electoral prospects,” said Víctor Blázquez Martín,

⁴⁸ Interview by the authors, August 25, 2025.

⁴⁹ Interview by Antonio Peña, September 23, 2025.

⁵⁰ Interview by Antonio Peña, September 18, 2025.

associate professor of political science at Universidad Carlos III de Madrid.⁵¹ “Pedro Sánchez has been using the Palestinian issue as a cover for his internal crises. It is a political calculation. He is not moved by conviction, but by how his [policy regarding the conflict in Gaza] serves him internationally,” said Prof. Alfonso Ballesteros Soriano, a scholar of the philosophy of law at Universidad Miguel Hernández de Elche.⁵²

With some irony, in the case of several P-8 countries the political strength of the anti-Israel camp may have been helped by the relatively negligible demographic presence of Muslim migrants. Some European countries where migration has become a hotly debated issue have seen the rise of populist parties, with Germany and France being the primary examples. Some of these parties tend to stress their support for Israel as an ally and a model in the fight against Islamism and for the preservation of Judeo-Christian values. They do so in part as a means to fend off allegations that they have fascist and antisemitic roots. Their popularity, which comes in part from traditional socialist electoral bases, shrinks anti-Israel coalitions even where those coalitions win power, and increases the Palestinian-skeptic voices on the political spectrum.

The only two P-8 countries where populist parties have had modest yet sustained political success are Spain and Norway. In Spain, the pro-Israel migration-skeptic Vox, founded in 2013, won 12.4% of the votes in the 2023 elections, a decline from their 2019 record and short of frustrating the formation of a leftist coalition. In Norway, the migration-skeptic Progress Party won 11.7% of the votes in the 2021 elections and a record 23.9% of the votes in the September 2025 elections. That achievement did not deprive the incumbent socialist-led coalition of its majority and thus did not facilitate a turnaround in the approach to Israel, but it added pro-Israel voices to the parliamentary opposition, where Progress members dominate the Friends of Israel caucus.

The role of antisemitism and the Holocaust in public discourses is the most ironic of the explanations for hostility toward Israel in the P-8 countries.

The Second World War exists today in Europe as a topical issue. It lingers over cultural and social debates, rings alarm bells, and supports political demands for gratitude, condemnation, and revisionism.

There are states whose role during the Second World War is a source of national pride. This small list includes Britain, Denmark, and Albania. There are states for which the Second World War is a source of shame and reflection. This list includes Germany, Austria, and, to a far lesser extent, Italy. A third category are states for whom the Holocaust plays complex, sensitive, and very publicly present political and cultural roles due to mixed legacies of being under Nazi occupation on the one hand and having had large antisemitic segments of the population that collaborated with the Nazis on the other. These include, among others, France, the Baltic states, and Poland.

P-8 countries belong (and are not unique in that) to two other categories. They either played no significant role in the Holocaust, commendable or shameful, as is the case of Ireland, Iceland,

⁵¹ Interview by Antonio Peña, September 25, 2025.

⁵² Interview by Antonio Peña, September 18, 2025.

Photo by Uriya Shavit



The Holocaust Memorial in Luxembourg City, August 2025

and Malta, or played a mixed role that is today subject to some public discussion, but has not become a centerpiece of school education, political discourse, and painful debates regarding national history and identity.

The latter category includes Spain, which cooperated with Nazi Germany and fascist Italy, but gave refuge to thousands of Jews.⁵³ It includes Slovenia, where, under Nazi German and Italian occupations, the majority of Jews were murdered, but that as a nation never fully reckoned with its pro-Nazi collaborators. It includes Belgium, where almost half of the Jewish population was murdered in the Holocaust, and which witnessed both collaboration and the underground heroism of saviors. It includes Norway, where about half of the Jewish population was heroically

⁵³ See the analysis of Israeli diplomat Raphael Schutz, former ambassador to Madrid: N. Markovitz, “The Diplomatic Inquisition [Hebrew],” *Yated Neeman*, September 29, 2025, p. 69.

saved with the help of the resistance movement, and the other half was murdered, including through the assistance of Norwegian collaborators.⁵⁴ It includes Luxembourg, where the vast majority of the 3,500 Jews present before the Holocaust were murdered, including those who escaped to France, and whose history involves the righteous acts of citizens who gave shelter to Jews and those who collaborated with the Nazis in hunting down the last Jew.⁵⁵

While present, in none of these countries has the Holocaust become a fiercely discussed and debated national wound or a major topic for study and contemplation at schools. It is remembered; it does not dominate the public memory. That difference provides a partial explanation for the intensity of the criticism against Israel in P-8 countries.

A comparison between Spain and Germany is instructive. A Staatsräson of the Federal Republic is that Germany bears a unique responsibility for the continued existence and security of the State of Israel, and thus the alliance with Israel is a core national interest. Criticism of Israel or of Jews is an exceptionally sensitive issue in German politics and culture. Israel has active strongholds of almost unconditional support in the country, including in friendship associations with thousands of members and in the largest media group, Axel Springer. Israelis who have spoken to a German audience on topical issues will recall how much hesitation and apologetics precede any question about Israeli policies that may ring critical.

These sensitivities and sentiments are completely absent from Spanish public discourse.

The aforementioned Pew Research Center poll conducted in the spring of 2025, which informed that 75% of the Spanish public holds unfavorable views of Israel, also informed that no less than 64% of Germans share the same view. This is, perhaps, the most damning and alarming of all the data about attitudes toward Israel published in the recent year.

Yet there are important nuances. First, whereas the unfavorable majority formed in Germany after almost two years of war included only 15% who described themselves as holding a “very unfavorable” view regarding Israel, in Spain, that majority included 46% who identified as holding a “very unfavorable” view. The anti-Israel camp in Spain is thus more radical and passionate in its opposition, whereas, even with the turnaround of public opinion, most Germans who are critical of Israel are more hesitant in expressing that sentiment, with 49% satisfied with stating that they hold a “somewhat” unfavorable view.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ In 2012, then-Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg issued the first apology of its kind for the role Norwegians played in the murder of Jews: “Norway Apologizes for Deporting Jews during Holocaust,” BBC, January 27, 2012, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-16761558>.

⁵⁵ “Luxembourg Says Sorry to Jews for World War II Government Collaboration with Nazi Occupiers,” World Jewish Congress, June 9, 2015, <https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/news/legislature-of-luxembourg-set-to-say-sorry-to-jews-for-world-war-ii-collaboration-with-nazi-occupiers-6-2-2015>. In 2015, the parliament issued an apology following the work of a panel of historians commissioned by the government that revealed the scope of enthusiastic participation by the local authorities in deporting Jews during the Holocaust. An impressive monument at the center of Luxembourg City, created by Holocaust survivor and sculptor Shlomo Selinger in 2018, commemorates the murdered Jews of the Grand Duchy.

⁵⁶ Laura Silver, “Most People across 24 Surveyed Countries Have Negative Views of Israel and Netanyahu,” Pew Research Center, June 3, 2025, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/06/03/most-people-across-24-surveyed-countries-have-negative-views-of-israel-and-netanyahu>.

Second, whereas the broad unfavorable public opinion in Germany gradually crystallized in response to the humanitarian situation that developed in Gaza, in Spain it existed already before and in the immediate aftermath of the October 7 attack, as indicated by YouGov surveys. In August 2021, when Israel had a centrist government, it was at -32% net favorability in Spain, compared to -12% in Germany. In November 2023, the net favorability of Israel in Germany was a mere -4%; in Spain, it was -50%.⁵⁷ The Spanish public, like its government, did not sympathize with Israel even in the immediate aftermath of October 7 and did not need an ongoing humanitarian disaster in Gaza to turn against it.

The different historical sentiments were reflected in policies. While the German government ultimately criticized Israel for its policies and issued a limited arms embargo, these actions stirred a fierce debate within the ruling conservative party, and were followed by a statement from Chancellor Friedrich Merz that “we have a clear compass: Germany is committed to Israel’s existence and security.”⁵⁸ Merz threatened that Germany would withdraw from the Eurovision, should the Spanish-led push to expel Israel succeed, describing the very entertainment of this initiative as “scandalous.”⁵⁹ As strong as the public unease about the situation in Gaza was, it led Germany in a very different direction than Spain.

In other large European countries where the Holocaust maintains a looming presence in national discourses and for which data are available, these nuances are less pronounced than in Germany, yet the existence of a more restrained public opinion in comparison to Spain is evident. The share of those holding a “very unfavorable” view toward Israel in Poland in the spring of 2025 was less than half that in Spain at a mere 22%; in France, it was 29%, and in Italy, 37%.⁶⁰ The net favorability of Israel was also considerably better than in Spain, although grim, at -25% in France and -37% in Italy (data for Poland were not available).⁶¹

All politics are local. This observation is associated with a former speaker of the American House of Representatives, Tip O’Neill. It is valid globally.

Nations, as do individuals, tend to identify with situations that remind them of themselves. Their pride. Their fears. Their struggles. The layers that make a national ethos.

The third aspect common to Israel-hostile P-8 countries is national narratives that are receptive to identification with the Palestinian cause. In the case of six of them, their historical memory is of independence acquired through laborious struggles and of being a weaker side coveted by stronger forces. That memory encourages perceptions of the Palestinians as a David whose struggles are reminiscent of their own, and of Israel, or what Israel has grown to become, as the Goliaths from which they were liberated.

⁵⁷ Mathew Smith, Head of Data Journalism, YouGov, “Net Favorability towards Israel Reaches New Lows in Key Western European Countries,” YouGov, June 3, 2025, <https://yougov.co.uk/international/articles/52279-net-favourability-towards-israel-reaches-new-lows-in-key-western-european-countries>.

⁵⁸ Tweet by Friedrich Merz, October 10, 2025: <https://x.com/bundeskanzler/status/1976541402956955859>.

⁵⁹ David Mouriquand, “German Chancellor Friedrich Merz Threatens to Boycott Eurovision Song Contest if Israel Is Excluded,” EuroNews, October 6, 2025, <https://www.euronews.com/culture/2025/10/06/german-chancellor-friedrich-merz-threatens-to-boycott-eurovision-song-contest-if-israel-is>.

⁶⁰ Silver, “Most People across 24 Surveyed Countries Have Negative Views of Israel and Netanyahu.”

⁶¹ Smith, “Net Favorability towards Israel Reaches New Lows in Key Western European Countries.”

There is little need to explain why, in the Republic of Ireland, which gained independence after centuries of brutally imposed British rule, such sentiments are strong, let alone given the crucial role British imperialism played in the creation of Israel. Perhaps there is also no need to explain why this is the case in tiny Malta. With 315 square kilometers, one of the smallest countries in the world achieved independence from Britain only in 1964, after centuries in which it exchanged hands between Muslim and Christian invaders and had not experienced a moment of independence. It forsook its relations with the Crown only in 1974.

Other historical memories receptive to Palestinian narratives are less familiar or expected. For example, Luxembourg.

Willem III, almost two meters tall, not always happy, not always glorious, reigned over the Netherlands as King, and, separately, over Luxembourg as Grand Duke. In the former he allowed liberalization, in the latter he kept power for himself. His erratic behavior, despotic tendencies, and scandalous addiction to sensual pleasures made him unpopular. Linguistically German and historically part of the Reich, Luxembourg's shrunk borders under his rule were the outcome of a complicated arrangement intended to establish a buffer zone between France and Prussia and prevent an all-out European war. France coveted the territory during his reign, but he secured its independent status and neutrality.

Willem III died in 1890. He was survived only by a daughter, Wilhelmina. The laws of Luxembourg, unlike those of the Netherlands, did not allow for a woman on the throne. A very distant cousin from the House of Nassau-Weilburg was offered the crown. The Grand Duchy was saved. But the peace did not last long.

We learned about the complicated history of the Grand Duchy and its long path to independence and security from the German-Luxembourgian journalist Thomas Klein, deputy head of the political department at the *Luxemburger Wort*. Ahead of the October 2025 abdication of the 70-year-old Grand Duke Henri, Klein published a series of articles on the pan-European politics that led to Luxembourg becoming a Grand Duchy, the only one of its kind in the world.

Klein explained that a history that involves borders shrunk by bigger powers, brutal occupations, and a right to exist as an independent sovereign state that was anything but obvious, encourages some in Luxembourg to compare their past struggles for liberation to those of the Palestinians.

"There is a saying here, *Wir wollen bleiben, was wir sind* – we want to remain who we are. For most of history, there was a question whether Luxembourg is viable as a state. The French said they would take over Luxembourg. And the Belgians, and the Dutch, and so forth," he said. In the 20th century, Germany swiftly occupied Luxembourg twice – in the First World War and the Second World War. The Grand Duchy survived all the assaults, but its public developed an appreciation that independence should not be taken for granted, coupled with sympathy with those who do not have it, and thus, when citizens of the Grand Duchy see the Palestinians, "they think that this could have been them."⁶²

⁶² Interview by the authors, August 28, 2025.

Prof. David Howarth, a Canadian-British political scientist from the University of Luxembourg, who has lived in the Grand Duchy since 2012, said: “Luxembourg is a country that lost considerable territory over the years. When the Nazis occupied it, they marched in a boom and said, ‘Well, you are all Germans now.’ That might help understand why many in Luxembourg are alert to the problems of the Palestinians.”⁶³

A national narrative receptive to identification with stateless nations struggling for dignity and independence can be also found in Slovenia. Home to slightly more than 2.1 million people on a territory almost equal in size to that of Israel, it is associated today with winter sports, basketball, and stalactite caves. Few outsiders remember that the former Yugoslav republic gained independence in the summer of 1991 following a 10 Day War of independence against the Serbian-dominated Yugoslav military. Belgrade aimed to prevent the disintegration of what, not long before, seemed the model for the possibility of a multi-ethnic, multi-religious state. In that war, the Slovenians overcame Yugoslav armored and air superiority through careful planning, massive secret mobilization, and clever use of asymmetric guerrilla warfare. David prevailed. In 1948, a national ethos grounded in that image would easily identify with the young Zionist state. In 2025, the Slovenians saw themselves in the Palestinians.

Norway is today a symbol of stability and peace; it is thus easy to forget that it gained full independence (under an imported Danish royal) only in 1905, after a century in which Sweden crushed its independence ambitions and imposed on it a union following a military campaign.

Iceland, approximately five times the size of Israel with less than 5% of its population and no military force, is another beacon of complacent serenity and secured independence that seems today to have always been so. Yet it gained independence from Denmark only in 1918 after six centuries of Danish rule, most of which direct, and fully detached from the Danish crown only in 1944.

The alignment of Palestinian narratives with Belgian and Spanish national narratives is more complicated. As Luxembourg, Belgium twice experienced brutal German occupation. The liberation from which, and the vulnerability it exposed, are part of the national ethos. Belgium is also a fragile federal union at a graver risk of disintegration than any other EU country. That renders the right of collectives of people to self-determination a theme of interest and utility for some. A history of imperial power responsible for particularly heinous crimes with which it has never fully reckoned or made amends also plays a role; it encourages strong anti-colonial sentiments and deflections of those sentiments elsewhere.

Spain is home to several separatist groups, primarily the Catalans and the Basques, who share with the Palestinians an ethos of an oppressed nation denied the right to self-determination, and enthusiastically support their cause. The specter of international institutions or great powers imposing the creation of new independent states is horrifying for the mainstreams of Spanish politics, which is why the Kingdom has, for example, remained one of a few countries in Europe that have yet to recognize the independence of Kosovo. However, the current socialist government is dependent on the support of Catalan separatists as well as that of the

⁶³ Interview by the authors, August 27, 2025.

radical, Marxist-inclined left. It cannot satisfy their core ambitions, making a deflection to an independence struggle far away, on which there is consensus on the left, a desired option.

Because of the Spanish civil war, some, particularly on the left, are receptive to a distorted understanding of the Palestinian-Zionist conflict as a binary struggle between the oppressed and the oppressors, in which the cause of freedom worldwide is at stake. That analogy is receptive to the historical lesson that the oppressors are certain to lose unless aided by external righteous forces.

“Spanish society has a special sensitivity shaped by our Civil War and dictatorship about violations of human rights. Since the 1930s, the Spanish left has seen itself on the side of the oppressed. That’s why there’s sympathy for Palestinians as victims,” said José Manuel Rivas Otero, a professor at the University of Salamanca who specializes in conflict studies and comparative politics.⁶⁴ “The Spanish left has always had a kind of romantic idealization of the Palestinian movement influenced by the armed struggle against [Franco’s] dictatorship. [The Palestinian struggle] was seen as a fight against oppression, so there was identification with it,” explained Manuel Jesús García Martín.⁶⁵

Indeed, while they have speedily deteriorated since October 7, 2023, Spanish attitudes toward Israel were far from rosy already before the war in Gaza. This takes us to the fourth shared aspect of P-8 countries: They have distant or more recent legacies of bias for the Arab side. Their pro-Palestinian stance did not emerge two years ago. When the October 7 attack occurred, their governments, and a majority of their publics, already had Israel framed as an ultimate villain and the Palestinians as the ever victims. That frame was too strongly embedded for the horrors of October 7 to put it in question.

In the case of Spain, relations with Israel were almost never without complications. Under Franco, it cultivated good relations with Arab countries, in part because of its dependency on oil and other supplies. The anti-Israel policy continued also during the early phases of transition to democracy. In September 1979, Adolfo Suárez became the first European president to receive the leader of the PLO, Yasser Arafat. Spain recognized Israel only in 1986.

While the intensity of the Spanish support for the Palestinian cause has had its highs and lows since then, the core commitment remained intact, and often a step ahead of other European countries. Already on November 18, 2014, the Congress of Deputies overwhelmingly approved a non-legislative proposition presented by the Socialist Parliamentary Group in favor of the recognition of Palestine as an independent state. At the time, the prospective recognition was conditioned by the existence of consensus on the matter in the EU.⁶⁶

The Maltese affinity for the Palestinian cause has been equally strong. The founding prime minister of the tiny country, Dom Mintoff, emerged since 1973 as a harsh critic of Israel and a fierce advocate for Palestinian rights, granting the PLO official status in Malta and repeatedly

⁶⁴ Interview by Antonio Peña, September 25, 2025.

⁶⁵ Interview by Antonio Peña, September 23, 2025.

⁶⁶ Ignacio Álvarez-Ossorio Alvariño, “Spain and the Palestine Question,” *Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question*, <https://www.palquest.org/en/highlight/35847/spain-and-palestine-question>.

condemning what he termed as Israeli aggression. One result of the close relations he formed with Libya in the 1970s in his quest to find rich allies and assert a nonaligned, anti-colonial position was that thousands of Maltese found work there and were acquainted with the more radical Arab points of view on the conflict, which they later transferred home.

While relations with Israel had a good start after Malta gained its independence, were maintained even in strained days, and were enhanced in the 2000s, the core Maltese sympathy for the Palestinian cause never dwindled. During the Israeli siege on Yasser Arafat's compound in 2002, Maltese President Guido de Marco phoned him on a daily basis and sent personal messages through European leaders, urging Israel not to harm the Palestinian leader.⁶⁷ In 2019, then-Maltese President Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca visited Israel and the Palestinian Authority, where she laid a wreath at the grave of Arafat in Ramallah and spoke about the unmitigated Maltese support for the right of the Palestinians to self-determination. The visit has not had the impact her Israeli hosts hoped for; today, no longer in office, she is one of the fiercest anti-Israel voices in Europe.

Ernest Hemingway said he went bankrupt in two ways: gradually, then suddenly. Several P-8 countries that did not have a long Anti-Israel history have witnessed in the 2010s a fundamental anti-Israel shift. What happened there was, at the time, dismissed by arrogant observers as anecdotal, rather than what it really reflected: small tides forecasting a heavy storm.

If you desire an assured triumph at a boring dinner party, try the next trivia question: Who was the first foreign head of state to address the Knesset?

It was Ásgeir Ásgeirsson of Iceland, on March 28, 1966. Ásgeirsson spoke about the support of the Icelandic people for the establishment of the State of Israel and the importance of advancing the cooperation between the countries, while the Speaker of the Knesset, Kadish Luz, spoke about the unique friendship between the Israeli and Icelandic peoples, and their shared advancement of welfare policies and parliamentary democratic institutions.

In recent years, that diplomatic honeymoon became all but forgotten history as Iceland embraced a particularly hostile agenda against Israel. Becoming the first European state to recognize a State of Palestine in 2011 was the cornerstone. Four years later, in September 2015, the City Council of Reykjavik, where more than a third of the island's population lives, passed a resolution banning all Israeli-made products (Israeli at large, rather than produced beyond the 1967 borders). The resolution, passed by a 9-to-5 majority, was proposed by Councilwoman Björk Vilhelmsdóttir, who said that she intends to spend the rest of the year doing humanitarian work in the Palestinian territories.

Another resolution by the City Council acknowledged the rights of the Palestinians to independence and a sovereign state of their own. It criticized what it called the Israeli government's "racist apartheid policy." Councilwoman Vilhelmsdóttir explained: "I believe that the city is sending

⁶⁷ Yannic Pace, "How the Palestine-Israel Conflict Has Spilled into Malta Over the Years," *Loving Malta*, May 18, 2025, <https://lovinmalta.com/opinion/analysis/how-the-palestine-israel-conflict-has-spilled-into-malta-over-the-years/>.

a clear message that it will not purchase products from Israel while Israel oppresses another people on the basis of ethnicity and race and continues having the wall inside Palestine.”⁶⁸

The boycott resolution was largely symbolic, as the City Council has no authority on diplomatic issues and had no trade relations with Israel. A week after its passage, it was retracted by the same Council, following a heated debate attended by BDS activists. Independence Party MP Björn Bjarnason argued that the boycott resolution should have clearly stated that it would only affect products from the occupied regions of Palestine, and not from Israel as a whole.⁶⁹

The fiasco may have seemed, at the time, a victory for Israel. Yet a crucial question was not broached: how did it happen that in a relatively quiet year in the Middle East, the local leaders of a European capital that is home to a small number of Arabs and Jews, in a country that had little involvement in the conflict before and has no national interests in the Middle East, developed such passionate, activist anti-Israeli sentiments?

The joke tells of a turtle that sits on the back of a galloping tiger. When they reach their destination, the turtle proudly exclaims: “How fast we run!”

There is a grain of truth in almost every joke, and the one in this brings us to the fifth shared aspect that explains P-8 hostility toward Israel. P-8 countries have in common not only a passion for the Palestinian cause, but also a limited capacity to influence Middle Eastern politics. The

Photo by Shutterstock



Anti-Israel demonstrators with Hizballah flag in Dublin, Ireland, October 5, 2024

⁶⁸ Itamar Eichner, “Iceland’s Capital Bans All Israeli Products [Hebrew],” *Ynet*, September 16, 2015, <https://www.ynet.co.il/article/4701022>.

⁶⁹ “Reykjavik Boycott of Israeli Products Retracted,” *Iceland Monitor*, September 23, 2015, https://icelandmonitor.mbl.is/news/politics_and_society/2015/09/22/reykjavik_boycott_of_israeli_products_retracted/.

scope of their bilateral economic, defense, and other ties with Israel implies that, unlike in the cases of Germany, France, or the United Kingdom, they have few levers to affect its policies directly. The structure of European institutions that requires consensus or close to consensus in decision-making implies that even in unity of purpose and action, they cannot, unless joined by others, make a difference.

Another political condition shared by P-8 countries is that they are, at present, less reliant on the United States than most other European countries. They are not at the forefront of the expansionist ambitions of fascist Russia as are Finland, the Baltic states, and the East European members of the EU. They do not court American goodwill to prevent the disintegration of NATO, as Germany, the United Kingdom, France, and Italy are embarrassingly forced to do. They are not embroiled in delicate regional issues that require or have the potential to require American mediation and support, as are the Balkan states, Greece, and Cyprus. Unlike Denmark, they have not found themselves in a bizarre territorial dispute with an erratic, ill-intending American administration.

The combination of relative immunity from American wrath and relative incapacity to affect Middle Eastern politics placed the P-8 countries in an awkward win-win situation. Their hostile views regarding Israel had little direct impact, yet involved few risks. Where their demands regarding the reaction to the war were not heeded, P-8 leaders benefited from basking in virtue signaling. Where ultimately embraced, P-8 governments were able to enjoy the sensation of running like a tiger. This does not mean that they were not concerned at all about diplomatic repercussions. Of the eight, only Belgium, under its new right-leaning government, is yet to recognize a State of Palestine. Yet it is possible that the four P-8 states that entertained through much of 2025 recognizing a State of Palestine without actually going the extra mile until France and the United Kingdom did, took a cautious path because they feared punching above their actual diplomatic weight.

The final aspect shared by P-8 countries is particularly frustrating to those who think Israel is not being treated fairly. The eight are characterized, although for different reasons, by weak pro-Israel public diplomacy (known in Hebrew as *hasbara*).

In two P-8 countries, Luxembourg and Iceland, Israel is represented through neighboring Israeli embassies (Belgium and Norway, respectively). In two, Malta and Slovenia, it is represented through a non-resident ambassador (the same for both). In one, Ireland, Israel closed its embassy a year into the war in retaliation for the escalation of the anti-Israel position. In all of the abovementioned five, the Jewish and Israeli-Jewish communities are tiny, and pro-Zionist Jewish activism is, unlike in several other European countries, minimal and under the radar where it exists at all.

Only three P-8 countries have fully functional Israeli embassies – Norway, Belgium, and Spain. As is the case of the five countries without a fully functioning diplomatic mission, the Jewish and Israeli-Jewish communities are tiny relative to the size of the population (in Belgium, where the number of Jews is the highest of the P-8, the majority are non-Zionist ultra-Orthodox). The impact of the Jewish and Israeli-Jewish populations on the public debate on the Middle Eastern conflict is thus negligible.

The absence of in-person, on-the-ground public, well-informed public diplomacy costs.

Yes – in theory, social media can be influenced from any point on the globe. Yet while social media, and the internet at large, are global instruments, they are largely consumed in national and local contexts, and to have an impact on those contexts, one has to be familiar with them culturally, politically, and linguistically. To work from within them, based on intimate knowledge of them, and not from the outside.

Yes – traditional media have lost much of their clout. Yet they are still crucial for public diplomacy, especially among decision-makers. To have a dominant voice in that media, Zoom calls are not enough. Journalists tend to be more attentive to sources of information who meet with them in person, and television producers prefer interviewees who can make it to the studio.

Where one voice is not heard, another is. If ever the story of how Iceland has become one of the most anti-Israel countries outside the Muslim world is written, a chapter will surely be dedicated to Salman Tamimi. The Palestinian sailor and construction worker turned high-tech professional moved to Iceland in 1971 at the age of 16. At the time, approximately 20 Muslims lived in the country.

In 1987, Tamimi founded the Iceland-Palestine Association and became an outspoken campaigner for Palestinian causes. In 2011, his sister, Amal, five years his younger, became the first foreign-born person to sit in the Icelandic parliament, although for a very short spell.

In a press interview in 2004, Tamimi explained why he believed Iceland should cut off its ties with Israel: “This idea that Israel is a tiny country trying to defend itself from all sides is a myth. It’s the most powerful nation in the region militarily. Their policies against the Palestinian

Photo by Uriya Shavit



Salman Tamimi preaches in Reykjavík, October 2017

people are in many ways worse than those which South Africa imposed upon the majority of its own people.”⁷⁰

At the time, the words sounded radical. Today, the Association prides itself on facilitating the Icelandic recognition of a State of Palestine in 2011.⁷¹

Kindhearted to guests, including Israelis, Tamimi was not an easy person. By his death in 2020, he had not only Israel on his list of rivals, but also some of his former partners in the mosque-scene he initiated in 1997 – and his sister. Yet the rival he despised the most never fought back. All through the decades in which Tamimi lobbied for the Palestinian cause in the Icelandic public, collecting donations, inviting lecturers, and sending volunteers, there was no counter-Israeli voice, no counter Iceland-Israel association to provide for a more nuanced public discussion.

Even non-aligned, moderate voices need to be echoed by similar voices, or else, biased pro-Palestinian extremism will flourish, establishing a threatening, imposing presence.

Corrine Cahen, born in 1973, is a member of the Luxembourgian parliament from the centrist Democratic Party that is in coalition. She is a former chairperson of her party, former Minister for Family Affairs and Integration, former manager of a small family shoe-shop chain, and former journalist. She is also a Jew who studied in the 1990s in Jerusalem in the high days of the suicide bus attacks, narrowly escaping one such attack. And she is a fierce critic of Benjamin Netanyahu, as she made clear early in our meeting.

The Christmas after the war began, the lively-spirited Cahen recorded a video for Instagram on the Middle East situation. “I will tell you what happened. I said in my message that I wanted peace and that in war, there are always two sides, and that the two sides have to decide to make peace. That a child is a child, and I don’t care if it is an Israeli child or a Palestinian child. That every human being matters.

“And then, after this was posted, I got this really, really hard shit storm on Instagram. What they wanted me to say was that Luxembourg should recognize Palestine, that Palestine should be freed from the river to the sea. I am completely secular. But my name is Jewish, I come from a Jewish family, so, you know, they immediately want me to say that Israel is wrong, and I didn’t say that.”

In his office in Valletta, Honorary Consul Strickland showed us with pride the front page of the *Times of Malta*, which he said his family owns. The just-published issue featured an extensive interview done through Zoom with the non-resident Israeli ambassador Ruth Cohen-Dar, one of the foreign office’s most seasoned diplomats.

We asked Strickland if that was not proof that efficient public diplomacy can also be done without a functioning, on-the-ground embassy.

⁷⁰ Paul Fontaine-Nikolov, “Reversing History,” *The Reykjavik Grapevine*, July 23, 2004, <https://web.archive.org/web/20140225235713/http://www.grapevine.is/Home/ReadArticle/REVERSING-HISTORY>.

⁷¹ “Goals of the Iceland-Palestine Association,” nd, <https://palestina.is/en/>.

He explained why Israel needs one in Malta. “If, say, I was a full-time ambassador here, and it was my full-time job, then Monday I would go have coffee with the Foreign Minister. Tuesday, with the French ambassador, she is completely pro-Palestine. Just have coffee, talk to her. Then with the Italian ambassador, the Spanish. Then with different ministers, with the Prime Minister, with the media. Speak for Israel around the clock. Organize a celebration on Independence Day. Meet up with the Chamber of Commerce. An honorary consul doesn’t have the time to do all these things. I have four companies, I have 170 employees, that is my first job.”

While Israel has not been playing all over the field in Malta, the Palestinians have. “Their public diplomacy is ongoing,” said Strickland. “They have an ambassador here [Fadi Hanania]. He is very active on social media. Somebody is funding him, and somebody is obviously paying for his suits and the nice cars, and his driver.”⁷²

Strickland’s 18-year-old son plays for a first-division Maltese football team. He invited us to watch their second match of the season. Sliema Wanderers versus Mosta. The small stadium overlooks gold-lighted medieval churches.

Only several dozen fans were present. The atmosphere was somewhat sleepy. The Sliema Wanderers lost to the inferior competition despite being in full control for 90 minutes.

The budgets of both teams on the pitch are, combined, about ten percent of the top Israeli premier league teams. We did not notice a marked difference in quality between the leagues. Despite heavy investments, never-ending optimism and a good amount of nationalistic bravado, Israeli football has been advancing backward, drifting away from European standards, surpassed by smaller states including Kosovo, Albania and Iceland. It is particularly weak on the defense.

Europe liked Israel more when it was a David. Tiny, vulnerable, struggling to survive against all odds. Israel should not apologize that, through many sacrifices, it is no longer a David. It should also recognize that negligence and arrogance often befall the Goliaths.

Policy Recommendations

1. Drawing on clause 19 of the American 20-point plan for the resolution of the Gaza conflict, the next Israeli government should present a creative and well-intending plan that offers a realistic prospect, even if extremely cautious and distant, for a form of mitigated Palestinian independence, and an Israeli commitment to avoid infrastructural actions that render such a prospect impractical. The Israeli plan should demand continued American and European commitments for the elimination of Hamas as a political and armed faction, an unequivocal Palestinian recognition of Israel as the national home of the Jewish people, and the intensive de-radicalization of Palestinian schools.

In the short rather than long term, the absence of such a plan will make Israel a pariah state in most of Europe, not just among the P-8 countries. It may lead to a similar result in the United States sooner rather than later.

⁷² Interview by the authors, August 21, 2025.

2. Israeli officials must reach out to the moderate elements of European social democracy, especially among the young, with both sides engaging in open dialogue that involves less preaching and more listening, and seeks common ground rather than virtue-signaling and confrontation.
3. Israeli officials should exercise more caution in labeling criticism and hostile diplomatic initiatives as antisemitism, even when these are harsh, unfair, hypocritical, and biased, and potentially legally justify these labels. Usage of that term should be preserved to clear-cut manifestations of Jew-hatred in order to maintain its credibility and avoid depleting it of meaning and effectiveness.
4. Israel must open fully functioning embassies in every European country. As the Maltese presidency of the UN Security Council during the war demonstrated, there are small and big states in Europe, but there are no unimportant states.

The budget for this essential initiative should derive foremost from closure of the gratuitous and damning Ministry of Diaspora Affairs and Combating Antisemitism, which, as our Center pointed to time and again, does a disservice to the causes it is tasked with promoting.

5. Every Israeli embassy in Europe should employ a full-time trained official responsible for communication with the traditional media and engagement with NGOs and Jewish organizations, and another full-time trained official responsible for social media and engagement with student and youth organizations.
6. Israel must significantly increase the number of influencers (journalists, bloggers, educators, junior politicians, community organizers, and artists) invited to visit the country, including from P-8 and other hostile countries. Contrary to the current policy, it should give visitors as free a hand as possible in seeing the country for themselves, as nothing more effectively dispels false narratives. Israel should also significantly increase the number of scholarships awarded to non-Israelis interested in attending Israeli institutions of higher education, in particular those training to be politicians, diplomats, and journalists.

– Prof. Uriya Shavit, with contributions from Antonio Peña and Dmitrii Sukhanov

JAPAN

HE WHO SAVES ONE LIFE

Reaching the quiet mountain town of Yaotsu in central Japan is no easy journey. From Kani, the nearest city with a hotel, the route winds through smaller rural towns and rice paddies before climbing into the forested green folds of Gifu Prefecture. The air cools, the roads narrow. After a thirty-minute taxi ride, one finally arrives at a cedar building on a hill overlooking the valleys of the Hida and Kiso Rivers, home of The Chiune Sugihara Memorial Hall. The museum opened in 2000. It has served since as one of the main platforms for teaching about the Holocaust in Japan.

Sugihara (1900-1986) was the son of a provincial doctor and a mother who encouraged his education. After studying at Waseda University, he joined Japan's Foreign Ministry and served in its imperial outposts of the 1930s, first in Japanese-occupied Harbin, Manchuria, where he mastered Russian and the ins-and-outs of diplomacy, and later in Finland, after his entry into the Soviet Union as Japan's special envoy was denied.

In 1939, Sugihara was appointed vice-consul to Kaunas, Lithuania, a republic squeezed between Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union. There, in the summer of 1940, he faced the decision that would define his life.

When the Soviets occupied Lithuania and German forces advanced eastward, desperate Jewish refugees gathered outside the Japanese consulate, pleading for transit visas that might carry them through the Soviet Union and on to safety in Japan or beyond. Tokyo's orders were unequivocal: no exceptions. But Sugihara, moved by the pleas of families, began to issue visas anyway. Day after day, he issued visas. His wife Yukiko helped him record them by hand. When he was ordered to leave the consulate in February 1941, he continued to write from his hotel, and when his train departed Kaunas for Berlin, he passed the last documents through the window to waiting hands. He issued 2,139 visas, saving an estimated 6,000 Jews in total. Their descendants number today as many as hundreds of thousands of people.

After the war, Sugihara returned to obscurity. Back in Japan in the spring of 1947, he was summoned by the Foreign Ministry and asked to resign, under the pretense of a lack of available positions in the ministry. In fact, he was summarily dismissed for insubordination; the resignation allowed the ministry to not appear to be punishing someone who had rescued Jews from certain death by providing Sugihara an option of retaining his honor despite his disobedience.

His career in shambles, Sugihara supported his family as a translator of Russian and salesman. For decades, few in Japan knew what he had done. It was the Jews who had crossed Siberia with his visas who eventually tracked him down in the 1960s and 1970s, visiting his modest home to express their gratitude.

In 1984, Yad Vashem named Sugihara as a Righteous Among the Nations, the only Japanese citizen ever to receive that title. He died two years later, still largely unknown in his own country.

In the years since, Sugihara has become Japan's most recognized humanitarian of the Second World War, his story retold in museums, textbooks, and films. The Chiune Sugihara Memorial Hall represents the culmination of that remembrance. Inside, visitors move through exhibits chronicling Sugihara's life: his childhood, diplomatic postings, and the famous "visas for life." A reconstruction of Sugihara's Kaunas office features his wooden desk, a pen poised above blank visa forms, and a single lamp casting light on the documents that changed thousands of lives. It is in this recreated office where visitors are encouraged to contemplate how they would have acted under similar circumstances: do nothing, or act with courage, even when the price is high?

The Memorial Hall's current director, Yuko Ito, who has been in her position since April 2025, was clear in our conversation as to the answer she desires: "When we think about Sugihara, we are left with the thought of 'we can do it, we can do it individually.' Sugihara was a diplomat, but even if you are not, you can do something [...] as human beings, as people, do something, don't just look on."¹

The Memorial Hall was established through the funding of the Chiune Sugihara Memorial Fund and the Japanese government, which allocated funds to municipalities in the country to support various projects, including in Yaotsu. Operated by the town and staffed by town employees, in 2024 the museum received almost 20,000 visitors, mostly Japanese families and schoolchildren, but also some Israelis, Americans, and Europeans.²

The museum's record number of visits, 52,000, was registered in 2015 following the release of the film *Persona Non Grata*, a Japanese-Polish biographical drama about Sugihara's life directed by Cellin Gluck. The film's success sparked Sugihara's broader resurgence internationally and in Japan's popular culture and consciousness. The film was screened widely, textbooks incorporated Sugihara's biography into ethics education sections, and television networks aired documentaries exploring his correspondence with survivors.³ The number of visitors then declined, averaging 31,600 annually until COVID-19 hit.⁴

Like the film, the Memorial Hall's exhibits emphasize universal lessons of peace, courage, and humanity, often framed in the language of harmony that anchors Japan's postwar pacifist ethos. This is both the museum's strength and its limitation. The Holocaust becomes a lesson in global morality, a call for empathy detached from the particularities of Jewish suffering. In Yaotsu, Sugihara's defiance is recast as an expression of Japanese virtue; a humanitarian act grounded in compassion rather than rebellion. Only passing mention is made of Japan's alliance with Nazi Germany.

This translation has profound consequences. By centering on Sugihara, Japan positions itself within global Holocaust memory not as a bystander, let alone as an assistant to perpetrators, but as a rescuer. This distortion enables Japanese engagement with the Holocaust while sidestepping its own contribution to Nazi evils. Sugihara thus becomes a mirror through which

¹ Interview by the author, September 23, 2025.

² Interview by the author, September 23, 2025.

³ Interview by the author, September 23, 2025.

⁴ Interview by the author, September 23, 2025.

Japan affirms its identity as a peace-loving nation and enables Japan to recast its wartime legacy and rebrand itself as a nation embodying humanitarian values.⁵

This is apparent in the trilingual displays in Japanese, English, and Hebrew introducing the Second World War in Europe and the Holocaust. Divided into two, the top half of the displays traces the fate of the Jews in Europe who did not escape and were murdered, starkly juxtaposed to the bottom half retelling the parallel story of Jews' rescue through Sugihara.

When asked if she was concerned that visitors will only see the Holocaust through the eyes of Sugihara, Ito expressed that the museum is trying to do both: show the people who were saved and those who were not, and that there were good people who did act. She explained that "the tragedy of the Holocaust is also a universal lesson. Most people were not good. What makes Sugihara so special is that there were hundreds of diplomats from other countries who did nothing to save Jews."⁶

A 2025 essay contest for high school students in the Gifu Prefecture who had visited the Memorial Hall asked pupils to write on the theme of "do the right thing" in the context of reflecting on Sugihara's decision. According to Ito, essays were largely insular, focused on school life and personal life within a Japanese context, and with no broader considerations. Of the more than 200 essays submitted, not a single pupil wrote about the Holocaust, the Second World War, or making an ethical decision that helps people in desperate need.

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The Holocaust Education Center (HEC) in Fukuyama, just north of Hiroshima, occupies a distinctive position within Japan's commemorative topography. Established in 1995 by the Reverend Makoto Otsuka, a pastor and long-time leader within the pro-Israel Christian Beit Shalom association, the HEC was the first museum in Japan devoted solely to the Holocaust. From inception, its mandate was educational and child-centered: to render the Holocaust comprehensible to Japanese schoolchildren through small, graspable particulars rather than through abstraction and inspire them to think and act independently to create peace.⁷

The HEC's establishment owes to Otsuka's formative encounter in 1971 with Otto Frank, the father of Anne Frank, in Netanya, Israel, and to his subsequent visits to Yad Vashem. Otsuka kept in close contact with Frank, who shared his memories and presented Otsuka with various personal and family effects while encouraging him to be a person who does something to create peace.

Frank was aware of the popularity of his daughter's diary in Japan. First translated in 1952, it became a postwar staple of moral education, generated cultural adaptations, such as in manga

⁵ See Rotem Kowner, "A Holocaust Paragon of Virtue's Rise to Fame: The Transnational Commemoration of the Japanese Diplomat Sugihara Chiune and Its Divergent National Motives," *The American Historical Review* 128, no. 1 (March 2023), pp. 31-32, 51-56.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Interview by the author, September 18, 2025.

Photo by Uriya Shavit



Chiune Sugihara display at the Holocaust Education Center in Fukuyama, Japan, September 2025

novels, and culturally resonated through the prism of “a kinship of victims,” through which Anne’s voice was mapped onto the nation’s engagement with the experience of nuclear devastation.⁸

Fifteen years after Otto Frank’s passing in 1980, Otsuka established the HEC and dedicated it to the memory of the 1.5 million Jewish children murdered in the Holocaust. The museum focused on exhibitions at children’s eye level. It privileged photographs and artifacts over long texts and sought to connect Japanese children to the Holocaust mainly through the story of Anne Frank.⁹

Demand quickly exceeded the capacity of the original center, and in 2007, the HEC moved into a larger facility of roughly twenty thousand square feet on the city’s edge. New installations included a reconstructed hiding space, a model of the Amsterdam attic associated with Anne Frank, and galleries that organize the administrative machinery of genocide around ordinary objects – a suitcase, a shoe, a garment, a form – meant to index a life interrupted rather than to overwhelm the novice viewer.¹⁰

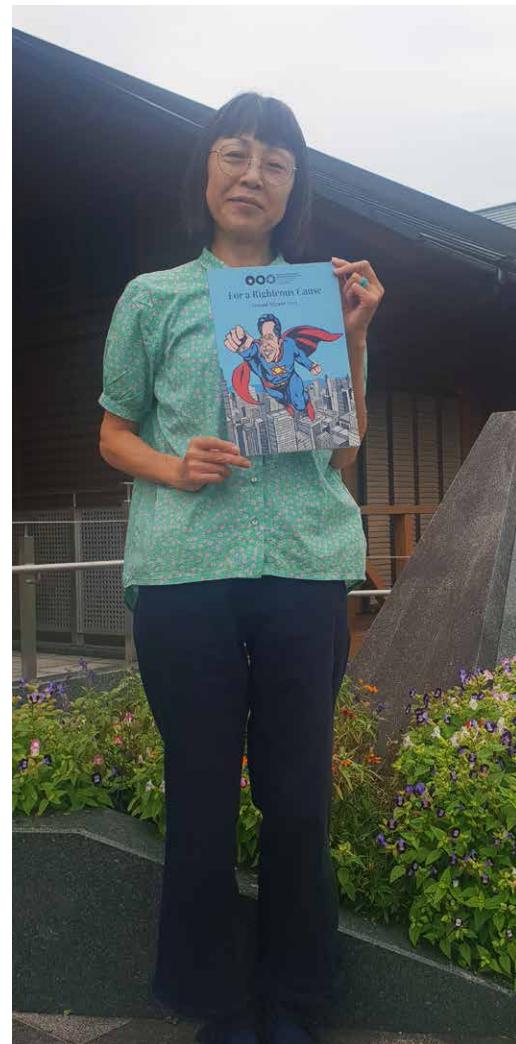
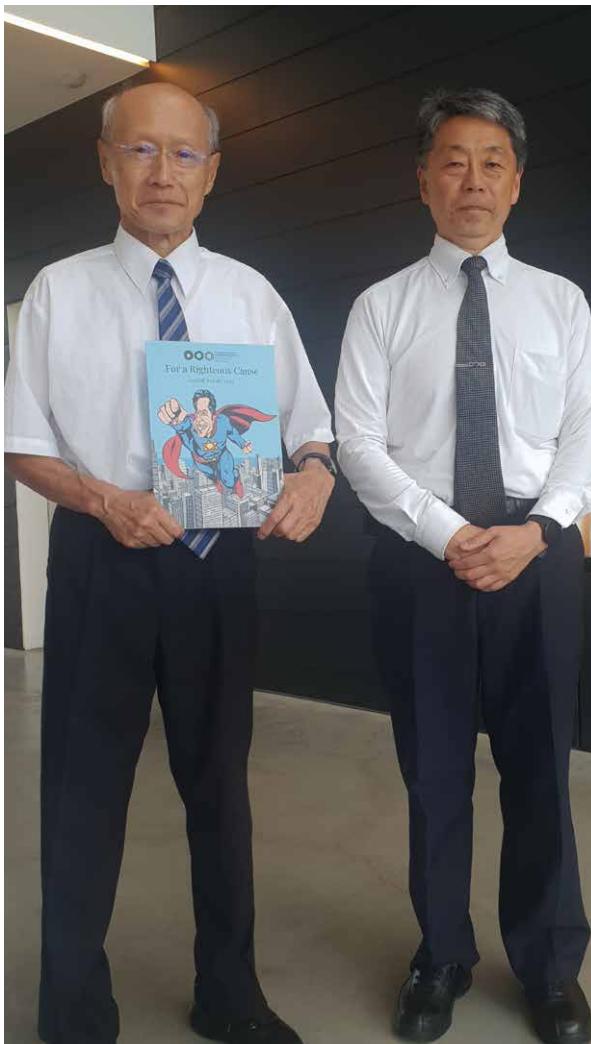
The design is calibrated to its audience, which is overwhelmingly scholastic. The HEC receives 7,000-8,000 visitors annually, of which 3,000 to 4,000 are Japanese schoolchildren. These numbers dropped significantly during COVID-19 and have now just returned to pre-COVID-19 levels. Other visitors are predominantly Japanese and Israeli adults, with Americans and

⁸ Ibid., and Cnaan Liphshiz, “Behind Japanese Fascination with Anne Frank, A ‘Kinship of Victims,’” Jewish Telegraphic Agency, January 21, 2014, <https://www.jta.org/2014/01/21/global/behind-japanese-fascination-with-anne-frank-a-kinship-of-victims>.

⁹ Interview by the author with Akio Yoshida, September 18, 2025.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Photos by Uriya Shavit



Holocaust Education Center founder Makoto Otsuka (left) and current director Akio Yoshida, Fukuyama, Japan, and Chiune Sugihara Memorial Hall director Yuko Ito, Yaotsu, Japan, September 2025

Europeans also visiting, but in fewer numbers.¹¹ Perhaps if the HEC was more centrally located, more Japanese schoolchildren would visit it and its impact would be more formidable.

According to current HEC Director Akio Yoshida, high school students in Japan can graduate without knowing about the Holocaust or the Second World War beyond the most basic details, if at all, due to the structure of the curriculum and that the topic is not included on final exams.¹² As a result, most of the children who visit the museum know little to nothing about the Holocaust, or even about Sugihara, something the HEC tries to overcome by providing educators with an 18-minute video for students before they visit.¹³

As in Yaotsu, pupils are brought by teachers who have chosen to make the Holocaust part of their curriculum, either because they had previously visited the museum, because of their personal interest in the Holocaust, or because of their religious conviction.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

The HEC leadership is aware of the risk of transforming the Holocaust into a generalized humanist lesson. It organizes encounters around concrete evidence and insists upon the Jewish specificity of Nazi persecution, thereby resisting the drift toward an undifferentiated pacifism.

The museum's Christian sponsorship adds a further layer to its significance. Japan's Jewish population is small. The HEC is thus not a communal repository but a chosen practice of remembrance by Japanese Christians in dialogue with Israeli and Jewish institutions.

This connection dates to the 1930s. Sitting in the HEC's offices, speaking in a combination of Japanese, English and Hebrew, Rev. Otsuka related his deep love of Israel and the Jewish people owes to the inspiration of his teacher, the Rev. Takeji Otsuki, who said he had a vision from God in the 1930s in which he was commanded to pray for the establishment of the state of Israel, the peace of Jerusalem and the coming of Messiah.¹⁴ Rev. Otsuki founded the Beit Shalom and inspired generations of Japanese Christian Zionists; Rev. Otsuka, through his life and the HEC, has dedicated himself to that same mission.¹⁵

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Japan is one of several countries with designated museums or special exhibitions dedicated to the Righteous Among the Nations who saved Jews from the Nazis and their allies. In Brněnec, Czech Republic, the Museum of Survivors opened in May 2025 on the grounds of the factory where Oskar Schindler (1908-1974) employed and thereby saved an estimated 1,200 Jews.¹⁶ For decades, the building lay abandoned, its brick walls pocked with age, its beams dark with soot.

Daniel Löw-Beer, a descendant of the factory's prewar Jewish owners that had turned it into a profitable and important European wool factory, led the project to reclaim the site as both a memorial and a reckoning with a shattered past. Inside, glass-walled galleries open onto unrestored factory floors, the ghosts of machinery still visible beneath the new construction. The architecture itself enacts a moral dialectic – restoration and ruin held in tension.

In 1938, the factory was seized by the Nazis from the Löw-Beer family. Six years later, as the Nazi's Eastern Front collapsed amid the advance of the Soviet Red Army, Schindler, who was born in Svitavy, a town just north of Brněnec, relocated his factory from Poland, bringing with him more than 1,000 Jews he employed. He convinced the Nazis that the labor of those Jews was critical to supporting the German war effort.¹⁷

Only four buildings remain on the site: the now renovated spinning mill, part of which is the museum; Schindler's office; the barracks of the SS troops; and Schindler's Ark, the building where the Jewish prisoners lived and worked. The museum features displays on Schindler, the

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ The Associated Press, "Museum Opens in Czech Republic at Site where Oskar Schindler Saved 1,200 Jews," NPR, May 12, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/05/12/g-s1-66131/holocaust-survivors-museum-czech-republic-oskar-schindler>.

¹⁷ Ibid., and Eli Wizevich, "The Czech Factory Where Oskar Schindler Saved 1,200 Jews Is Now a Museum in Their Honor," *Smithsonian Magazine*, May 14, 2025, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/the-czech-factory-where-oskar-schindler-saved-1200-jews-is-now-a-museum-in-their-honor-180986622/>.

Löw-Beer family, and the testimonies of survivors, as well as spaces for exhibitions, lectures, and film screenings.

Schindler's act of rescue unfolded within an economy of theft. His decency cannot be disentangled from the profits of war, a moral entanglement and contradiction that Löw-Beer's curatorial vision does not shy from. The museum, which currently only opens on select days, is aimed at educating secondary school children from the Czech Republic and surrounding countries, including Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, and Germany.¹⁸

Across the Atlantic, in Martin, Tennessee, another institution centers on the saviors of Jews. The University of Tennessee at Martin's 2024 exhibition, Righteous Among the Nations, occupies a modest space at the university's J. Houston Gordon Museum in the Paul Meek Library.¹⁹ Among the 22 Righteous individuals featured in the exhibition are Sugihara and one of only five Americans to have received the honor, Roderick "Roddie" Edmonds (1919-1985) of Knoxville, Tennessee.²⁰

Edmonds was a non-commissioned officer who was captured in the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944 and sent to a German prisoner of war camp, first to Stalag IX-B at Bad Orb and then to Stalag IX-A in Ziegenhain.²¹ The ranking officer in camp at Ziegenhain, Edmonds was responsible for more than 1,200 American POWs. When the camp commandant ordered Jewish soldiers to report themselves the morning after their arrival in camp in order to be separated and identified, Edmonds ordered all American soldiers to appear in formation. Enraged when he saw all the Americans without racially-based exceptions, the camp commandant demanded Edmond give up the Jewish soldiers, to which he replied, "We are all Jews here."²² That refusal to collaborate, spoken at gunpoint, saved roughly two hundred men.

Save for the exhibit and the efforts of Edmond's son to preserve the memory of his father's heroism, Edmonds' story remains largely unknown. Recognized in 2015 by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations, the US government and US Army have not recognized him, and a 2022 effort to award him a Congressional Gold Medal failed to secure enough votes, though efforts continue.²³

If Tennessee grounds righteousness in duty, Dubai turns it into a language of intercultural encounter. In 2021, within the Crossroads of Civilizations Museum, curator and former Emirati parliamentarian Ahmad 'Ubayd al-Mansuri inaugurated the "We Remember" Holocaust memorial exhibition, the first and thus far only permanent exhibition on the Holocaust in the

¹⁸ Arks Foundation, "Saving Schindler's Ark," arksfoundation.net, nd, <https://arksfoundation.net/>.

¹⁹ "Righteous Among the Nations' Exhibition Opens on Campus," UT-Martin, February 15, 2024, <https://news.utm.edu/2024/02/15/righteous-among-the-nations-exhibit-opens-on-campus/>.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Richard Hurowitz, "The Story of an Unjustly Overlooked American World War II Hero," *Time*, August 19, 2023, <https://time.com/6306430/roddie-edmonds-american-world-war-ii/>.

²² Ibid. and "About," roddieedmonds.com, nd, <https://www.roddieedmonds.com/about>.

²³ Hurowitz, "The Story of an Unjustly Overlooked American World War II Hero."

Arab world.²⁴ The exhibition includes information on the persecution of European Jews by Nazi Germany from *Kristallnacht* to the implementation of the Final Solution, photos and exhibits commemorating the 1.5 million Jewish children murdered in the Holocaust, and personal testimonies of Holocaust survivors.

Al-Mansuri believes the history of the Holocaust should be conveyed primarily through the stories of heroes who fought evil. Panels present the Mishna verse “Whoever saves one life, it is as if he has saved all mankind” and its Quranic equivalent, and digital displays narrate the rescue of European Jews by Muslims. The exhibition introduces the story of the hundreds of Jews who found refuge in Albania in 1943 and were welcomed by its majority-Muslim population. It also tells the story of individual heroes, including Muhammad Hilmi (1901-1982), an Egyptian physician who lived in Berlin and, at great personal risk, saved the life of a Jewish friend, Anna Boros, and several members of her family. Hilmi was the first Arab to be recognized by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations.²⁵

Across the continent in Shanghai, a city once divided by foreign concessions, another museum tells a quieter story of rescue through bureaucracy. The Jewish Refugees Museum, housed in the restored Ohel Moshe Synagogue in the Hongkou District, originally opened in 2007 and reopened in 2020, chronicles the extraordinary flight of over twenty thousand Jewish refugees to Shanghai between 1938 and 1941.²⁶

One small gallery is dedicated to Dr. Feng Shan Ho (1901-1997), the Chinese consul in Vienna who, defying both Nazi and Chinese directives, issued over 1,900 visas to Austrian Jews.²⁷ His consular seal, displayed on several passports and visas he provided, has become a modest relic of moral administration like that of Sugihara. The exhibition situates Ho within a broader narrative of humanitarianism, seeking to create “a community of a shared future for mankind.”²⁸ Panels describe how Shanghai, one of the few open ports in the world, became a refuge when most nations had closed their borders.

Far to the northwest, on Ķīpsala Island in Riga, Latvia, the Žanis Lipke Memorial Museum offers a different form of intimacy. Completed in 2012, the building, designed by architect Zaiga Gaile, resembles a dark, steep-roofed wooden ark, its exterior weathered. Lipke (1900-1987), a dockworker, and his wife Johanna, rescued more than fifty Jews whom they smuggled from

²⁴ Uriya Shavit and Ofir Winter, “The Muslim World: Holocaust Memorial Museums in Indonesia, Dubai and Albania,” *For A Righteous Cause 2025*, Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry, January 2025, pp. 17-19, <https://cst.tau.ac.il/publications/for-a-righteous-cause-2025/>; Uriya Shavit, “Notes From the Emirates,” *Perspectives 23*, Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry, April 2023, <https://cst.tau.ac.il/perspectives/notes-from-the-emirates/>; Ofir Winter, “Discovering the Past, Building a Future,” *For A Righteous Cause 2022*, Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry, January 2022, pp. 5-7, <https://cst.tau.ac.il/for-a-righteous-cause/>.

²⁵ Shavit and Winter, “The Muslim World,” p. 18.

²⁶ Yang Jian, “Jewish Refugees Museum Opens New Chapter of History,” City News Service, December 14, 2020, <https://www.citynewsservice.cn/articles/shanghaidaily/news/jewish-refugees-museum-opens-new-chapter-of-history-yn6v1bdk>.

²⁷ Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum, “Permanent Exhibition: Fleeing to Shanghai – Dr. Feng Shan Ho,” shkjrm.com, nd, https://www.shhkJRM.com/en/Exhibitions/Permanent_Exhibition.htm.

²⁸ Jian, “Jewish Refugees Museum.”

the Riga Ghetto during the Nazi occupation by hiding them in a bunker beneath their home, providing them with food and arranging for them false documents to flee the country.²⁹

The memorial's architecture embodies concealment. Windowless, narrow passages and dim lighting reproduce the fear and claustrophobia of hiding. The engaging and passionately administrated museum pays tribute to the Lipkes' heroism. For Latvian students, hundreds of whom visit each year and who comprise much of the audience, guides emphasize the Lipkes' courage. They do not entirely obscure the participation of some Latvians in Nazi crimes. However, they do so through the lens of heroism and courage, telling an incomplete story.

While over 400 Latvians have been recognized for saving Jews, the majority was indifferent. Worse still, the extermination of Latvian Jews was largely done by local collaborators with exceptional ruthlessness and brutality. These were Latvians who turned on their neighbors under Nazi auspices.³⁰ The main museum through which Latvians learn about the Holocaust thus conveniently highlights the exception rather than counters the dark truth.

In the small Bulgarian town of Kyustendil, the Dimitar Peshev Museum stands as a testament to one man's courage and moral conviction. Housed in the rebuilt home of Bulgaria's former deputy speaker of parliament, the museum commemorates Peshev's (1894-1973) pivotal role in halting the planned deportation of 48,000 Bulgarian Jews in March 1943. When he learned of the government's intentions, Peshev mobilized parliamentary protest and enlisted the support of both the Orthodox Church and King Boris III, actions that successfully prevented the deportation of Jews within Bulgaria proper. Tragically, his intervention could not save the more than 11,000 Jews from Bulgarian-occupied Thrace and Macedonia who were sent to their deaths, a haunting reminder of the limits of individual agency under a complicity-ridden regime.³¹

Opened in 2002, visitors to the museum encounter photographs of Peshev's petitions alongside maps of deportation routes, tracing both the geography of salvation and the pathways of loss.³² For decades, Bulgaria emphasized the "rescue of the Bulgarian Jews" as a national virtue, often overlooking its more troubling chapters of collaboration and displacement. The Kyustendil museum confronts this selective memory, offering a nuanced narrative in which acts of conscience emerge amid complicity, and heroism is inseparable from the moral ambiguities of the time. It is both a memorial to bravery and a space for reflection on the complex interplay of courage, responsibility, and historical accountability.

Taken together, the museums and exhibitions dedicated to the Righteous Among the Nations form a global presence of moral geography. Each translates the same impulse to remember, commemorate, and advance the legacy of different heroes into a local context.

²⁹ David Silberman, *Lipke's List: The story of Žanis Lipke and the Jews He Saved* (Riga: Janis Lipke Memorial, 2020), pp. 19-38.

³⁰ Carl Yonker, "Past Present," Perspectives no. 25, Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry, August 2023, <https://cst.tau.ac.il/perspectives/past-present/>.

³¹ "Dimitar Peshev – The Story," peshev.org, nd, <https://www.peshev.org/story.htm>, and "Dimitar Peshev (Bulgaria)," Yad Vashem, nd, <https://www.yadvashem.org/righteous/stories/peshev.html>.

³² "Dimitar Peshev House-Museum, Kyustendil," nf-21.com, nd, <https://nf-21.com/DC/en/material-assets/kyustendil/kyustendil-municipality/379-house-museum-dimitar-peshev-kyustendil>.

Yet the focus on the righteous in those museums and exhibitions, including, in particular, those who are singular in dealing with the Holocaust in their countries or regions, also carries risks. The Holocaust is mainly a story of human cruelty and criminality, not one of heroism and virtue. While it is important to highlight and praise the roles of the righteous individuals who risked their lives and resisted evil, it should be remembered that their stories are the exception, not the rule. The historical roots of European and German antisemitism, the cruelty and cynicism of the Nazis and their allies, the indifference to Jewish life that abounded among entire publics, the suffering of the victims, the elimination of entire communities – they should forever remain the focus of any engagement with the Holocaust.

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Visits to Holocaust memorial museums around the world trigger historical-philosophical questions. In Japan, I could not help wondering how Germany would remember Nazism today, if in the 1930s and 1940s it was the same failed fascist, militaristic expansionist ideology, yet devoid of antisemitism and its murderous consequences.

In the heart of Tokyo, tucked behind the torii gate and shaded by gingko trees, the Yasukuni Shrine presents a scene of ritual, commemoration, and quiet that belies the intensity of the memory it holds. The venerable Shinto shrine, established in 1869 during the Meiji Restoration, is dedicated to those who died in service to the country. Some 2.5 million souls are enshrined, including over one thousand war criminals, among whom are fourteen Class-A war criminals convicted of “crimes against peace” during the military tribunals commonly known as the Tokyo Trials that followed the Second World War who were quietly added to the shrine in 1978.³³

On the same grounds stands the Yushukan Museum, a military-history museum that traces Japan’s imperial wars from the Meiji Restoration to the end of the Second World War. Its two floors are filled with gleaming exhibits dedicated to demonstrating the sacrifices and heroism of Japan’s war dead.

The shrine and museum have become central to Japan’s contested relationship with its wartime past, offering a lens through which to view deeper questions of memory, responsibility, victimhood, and the politics of commemoration in Japan’s Second World War legacy.

Visiting the Yushukan museum, one is confronted with a narrative of war that does not begin with the rise of Japanese militarism and aggression. Rather, it informs that Japan’s modernization under Meiji, the threat of encroaching Western colonial powers, and the desire for Asian solidarity set the scene for a war of tragic necessity.

Upon entering, visitors are greeted by a Zero fighter plane, the highly maneuverable, long-range Imperial Japanese Navy aircraft that dominated the skies of the Pacific early in the war, and a Class C56 steam locomotive from the Thai-Burma Railway with a panel noting it had “been

³³ “Hirohito Quit Yasukuni Shrine Visits Over Concerns about War Criminals,” *The New York Times*, April 26, 2007, <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/26/world/asia/26iht-japan.1.5447598.html>; David Kenley, “History and Memory: The Role of War Memorial Museums in China and Japan,” *History, Literature, and the Construction of ‘Memory’ in Asia* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2009), p. 10; and Higurashi Yoshinobu, “Yasukuni and the Enshrinement of War Criminals,” *nippon.com*, November 25, 2013, <https://www.nippon.com/en/in-depth/a02404/>.

commandeered to the south for the Greater East Asian War” and “played an important role in Thailand.” The modest explanation fails to mention the tens of thousands of Allied prisoners of war and Asian laborers forced by the Japanese to build the “Death Railway,” with some 100,000 dying during its construction.³⁴

Inside, the museum is divided into two floors. The tour begins on the second floor, dedicated to relating Japan’s military history from the Meiji period through the Second Sino-Japanese War (referred to as the “China Incident”), before returning visitors to the first floor, dedicated to the Second World War (referred to as the Greater East Asia War). Throughout the museum, exhibits of uniforms, flags, swords, personal letters, pictures, and other effects are accompanied by displays relating the history of Japan’s military conflicts, all presented in a historical narrative of “Japan under threat,” “duty to Asia,” and “tragic national sacrifice.”

A display addressing America’s entry into the Second World War suggests that the Roosevelt administration took a confrontational approach to Japan, abrogated the US-Japan Trade and Navigation Treaty, and imposed an oil embargo (Japan was overly dependent on American oil imports at the time). That, according to the display, triggered the war. It further argues that diplomatic negotiations in 1941 failed because of the harsh terms demanded by the United States. Not seeing any room for compromise, Japan concluded that war was inevitable and ordered the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

The Yushukan Museum embodies one of three broad narratives that shape Japan’s historical memory of the Second World War: revisionism. The revisionist narrative, which has gained traction in the country since the 1980s in nationalist and conservative circles, promotes a reinterpretation of Japan’s wartime past, depicting Japan as an Asian liberator that fought the American aggressor and resisted Western colonialism. It highlights narratives of self-sacrifice and self-defense while downplaying or omitting Japanese imperialism, colonial exploitation, and the atrocities and war crimes it committed in East Asia.³⁵

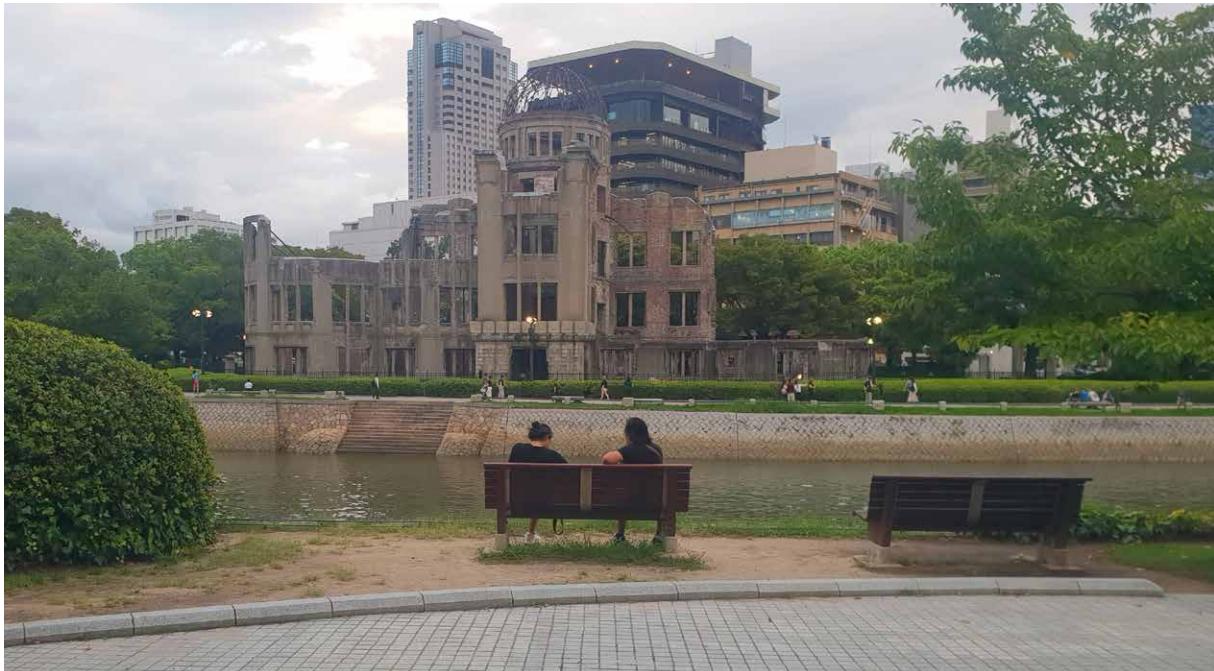
Thus, the museum speaks of the “China Incident” and not the “Rape of Nanjing” in which the Imperial Japanese Army massacred over 200,000 Chinese civilians, non-combatants, and prisoners of war. Any mention is omitted of atrocities committed by Japan during the Second World War, such as sexual slavery (so-called “comfort women”) and the human experimentation that was part of the development of chemical and biological weapons by Unit 731 in the puppet state of Manchukuo on mainland China.

The revisionist narrative intersects and conflicts with the two other predominant Japanese narratives around memory of the war: victimhood and pacifism. These narratives are embodied at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park and Hiroshima Peace Museum.

The skeletal Atomic Bomb Dome (Genbaku Dōmu) stands at the Peace Memorial Park along the Motoyasu River. It is a ruin of August 6, 1945, when an American B-29 bomber dropped the atomic bomb “Little Boy” at 8:15 am, destroying the city and killing an estimated 140,000

³⁴ John Breen, “Yasukuni Shrine: Ritual and Memory,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal / Japan Focus* 3, no. 6 (2005), p. 3.

³⁵ Kenley, “History and Memory,” p. 5; and Akiko Takenaka, *Yasukuni Shrine: History, Memory, and Japan’s Unending Postwar* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2015), pp. 11, 164-166.



Atomic Bomb Dome in Hiroshima, Japan, September 2025

people. The Peace Museum features testimonies and is filled with thousands of artifacts from the survivors and the destruction. It conveys the horror of nuclear war in immediate, visceral form.

Hiroshima's memory is one of civilian suffering, nuclear devastation, and pacifist hope. The story told is about a nuclear bomb that indiscriminately killed and wounded tens of thousands of people. It is about horror and inhumanity that must be related so that there are "no more Hiroshimas."

The memory that Hiroshima projects is one of victimhood and pacifism rather than reckoning with the Japanese responsibility for the start of the war that led to the bombing. Hiroshima is taught primarily as a symbol of suffering inflicted on Japan, not of Japan's role in waging the war that preceded the bombing.

The inscription on the cenotaph in the Peace Memorial Park reads "Let all the souls here rest in peace ... for we shall not repeat the evil." Broadly interpreted, it is a pacifist call for all humanity against war; narrowly interpreted, a pacifist call against the use of nuclear weapons. Such lessons are admirable, but the narrative of the memorial omits the agency and culpability of Japan in the war and events that led up to that fateful, destructive moment.

The narratives of victimhood and pacifism dominate Japanese historical memory, extending beyond the tragedies of the nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to cast Japan as the victim of fire-bombings, intense conventional bombings, invasion, and defeat. Suffering is acknowledged, but agency and responsibility are not.

The pacifist narrative emerged strongly in the immediate postwar era. Japan's 1947 Constitution renounced war, and the new identity of a "peace nation" (shugoku) took hold. The Hiroshima Peace Museum and Peace Memorial Park undergird this narrative, making war something to reject and militarism something to repent. Yet, together with the narrative of victimhood, the

narrative of pacifism frames Japan only as a victim, not an aggressor. It is selective: it remembers Japanese suffering more readily than Japanese violence.

The three narratives do not align neatly. They often conflict. The victimhood narrative wants Japan to be seen as innocent and wronged; the pacifist narrative seeks a break with militarism; the revisionist narrative seeks dignity without apology.

The question emerges: how should Japan remember the war in the Pacific, and how should memorials function? It is linked, more broadly, to the question of how Japan should remember the war in Europe and the Holocaust, or should it at all?

The controversies surrounding the Yasukuni Shrine reveal the difficulties Japan faces in reconciling its national pride with its wartime guilt. In Germany, the Holocaust serves as an organizing principle for remembrance. It anchors the nation's moral reckoning with its Nazi past. Japan does not have a similar anchor. Even the Nanjing Massacre and the sexual enslavement of "comfort women" remain contested in public discourse.³⁶ This divergence has led historian Ian Buruma to suggest that Germany's memory culture is structured around guilt, while Japan's is structured around loss.³⁷ The contrast is striking. In the Japanese narrative, war is a tragedy rather than a crime.

If one removes the Holocaust from the equation, can Japan's war be equated in moral terms with Germany's? Were the Japanese as "evil" as the Germans in the Second World War – or perhaps as culpable as Germany in the First?

The questions, uncomfortable as they may be, expose the moral hierarchy that structures the memory of the twentieth century. The answer must be careful and considered. Nazi Germany and Japan were very different in kind, though similar in dimensions of violence, ideology, and empire. The challenge is not moral ranking but moral recognition.

The Holocaust, which industrialized the mass murder of six million Jews, established an absolute moral benchmark; any nation that did not partake in the extermination of Jews appears, by contrast, less malevolent. Yet this comparative logic risks obscuring Japan's own record of atrocity during the Second World War: The massacre of civilians in China, biological and chemical warfare, and human experimentation by Unit 731, the starvation and torture of prisoners of war, and the systemic enslavement of women across Asia.³⁸ These acts did not seek the total extermination of a specific people, but they did embody a racial ideology that positioned Japan as the superior power in Asia, a parallel, if not an equivalent, to the racial hierarchies that underpinned Nazi thought.

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When reporters asked President Franklin D. Roosevelt from where bombers had taken off for the April 12, 1942, Doolittle Raid on Tokyo, named after Lieutenant Colonel James Doolittle,

³⁶ John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1986), pp. 47-49.

³⁷ See: Ian Buruma, *The Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany and Japan* (New York: The New York Review of Books, 2015).

³⁸ See, for example, Yuki Tanaka, *Hidden Horrors: Japanese War Crimes in World War II* (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 45-66, 92-99, 135-156.

he quipped, “Shangri-La,” invoking the mythical Himalayan paradise from James Hilton’s *Lost Horizon* (1933). Two years later, the joke became literal: Doolittle’s wife Josephine christened a carrier in honor of the imaginary airfield.

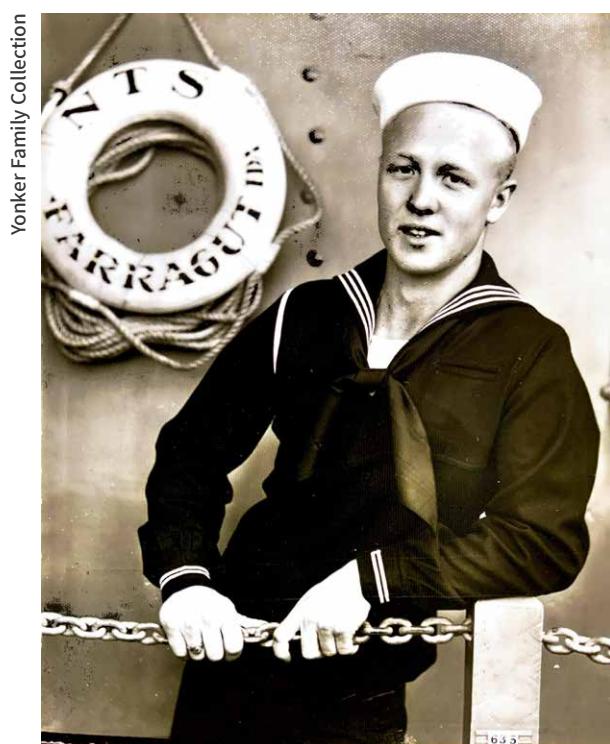
On September 16, 1945, following the Japanese surrender, the USS *Shangri-La* CV-38 entered Tokyo Bay, anchoring off Yokohama just south of Tokyo. Its operational history was brief yet important. It joined the Pacific Fleet in April 1945 after traversing the Panama Canal, completing further training at Pearl Harbor, and launching strikes against Okinawa and then on Honshu and Hokkaido during the war’s final months. By late summer, the ship was part of Task Force 38 that raided Tokyo’s outskirts as Japan teetered on collapse in July 1945.

One of the sailors on board, commissioned on September 15, 1944, was a twenty-year-old farm boy from Marion, Nebraska, who turned Navy Fireman. His name was Edward Yonker. He was my grandfather.

Grandpa Ed never liked to talk much, not even about his days of heroism. When he did, he tended to discuss facts, not emotions. I do not remember much of what he told me about the war. I do remember his story of how he had to get his mother’s permission to enlist because two of his brothers were already in combat.

As I traveled across Japan, learning about local perspectives of the Second World War and the Holocaust, I realized for the first time what an immense debt of gratitude my generation owes to that of my grandfather. I understood for the first time the meaning of the cliché that freedom must never be taken for granted and that some things are worth fighting for, whatever the price. And I felt, as I haven’t felt for a long time, how much I miss my grandfather.

I dedicate this study in loving memory to Edward Yonker.



US Navy Fireman Edward Yonker

Policy Proposals

1. **Educators, for the sake of history and justice – stay focused.** Commendable as they are, museums and exhibitions dedicated to the Righteous Among the Nations, or paying equal attention to evildoers and rescuers, risk distorting both the study of the Holocaust as a historical event and the discussion about its moral lessons. Schools and other institutions that attend those museums are advised to do so only after their pupils have gained thorough and unsparing knowledge about the roots of modern antisemitism, the rise of Nazism as an ideology and practice, and how the murder of six million Jews was enabled and facilitated.
2. **Emphasize the exceptionality.** Museums, exhibits, and educational material on Righteous Among the Nations worldwide should emphasize and make clear the exceptionality of the individuals represented, stressing that when Jews and other minorities were sent to their deaths, most people did not act and stood by, while others actively participated in the murder.
3. **Let Israelis Know.** As a form of Hakarat Hatov and as a lesson in courage and the importance of the universal values of human rights and dignity, Israeli schoolchildren should be required to learn about and engage with the story of one Righteous Among the Nations every year.

– **Dr. Carl Yonker**

FRANCE

A TRIAL STILL IN SESSION

On July 12, 2025, the Élysée announced that France would annually mark July 12 as a national day of commemoration for Captain Alfred Dreyfus.¹ On that day in 1906, the Court of Cassation annulled the conviction that had sent Dreyfus to Devil’s Island on charges of treason. The new commemoration day will stand alongside France’s four other main civic and military national holidays: Bastille Day (July 14); Labour Day (May 1); Victory in Europe Day (May 8); and Armistice Day (November 11).

President Emmanuel Macron said that the annulment of Dreyfus’ conviction was a historical milestone that reflected “the victory of justice and truth against hatred and antisemitism.” Macron warned that today, more than ever, “we must always show vigilance and perseverance against these old antisemitic demons,” as “the lineage of the heirs of the anti-Dreyfusards, anti-Republicans, and antisemites of the early and mid-20th century has never been extinguished.”²

Macron’s announcement followed another symbolic political act. On June 2, 197 members of the National Assembly voted unanimously to posthumously promote Dreyfus to the rank of brigadier general in a parliamentary motion of reparation 130 years in the making. Portrayed as an important symbolic step in the fight against antisemitism in today’s France, the bill was put forward by former French prime minister MP Gabriel Attal, the leader of President Macron’s liberal-centrist Renaissance party (RE).

The vote was swift and broadly supported across the political spectrum. In November 2025, the French Senate approved the promotion and Macron and French Prime Minister Sébastien Lecornu signed it into law.³ MP Charles Sitzenstuhl of Macron’s Renaissance party, who praised the promotion as an act that “will go down in history,” went further and suggested that Dreyfus be entombed in the Panthéon in Paris, the mausoleum where France’s greatest heroes are buried.⁴

¹ Le Monde with AFP, “Macron Declares July 12 Annual Dreyfus Commemoration Day,” *Le Monde*, July 12, 2025, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/politics/article/2025/07/12/macron-declares-july-12-annual-dreyfus-commemoration-day_6743305_5.html.

² Emmanuel Macron, “A Day of National Commemoration for Alfred Dreyfus, for the Victory of Justice and Truth against Hatred and Antisemitism [French],” *elysee.fr*, July 12, 2025, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2025/07/12/une-ceremonie-de-commemoration-pour-alfred-dreyfus-pour-la-victoire-de-la-justice-et-de-la-verite-contre-la-haine-et-lantisemitisme>.

³ Le Monde with AFP, “Captain Alfred Dreyfus Receives Posthumous Promotion 130 Years after Scandal,” *Le Monde*, November 18, 2025, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/politics/article/2025/11/18/captain-alfred-dreyfus-receives-posthumous-promotion-130-years-after-scandal_6747575_5.html.

⁴ Le Monde with AFP, “French Lawmakers Unanimously Back Posthumous Promotion for Captain Alfred Dreyfus,” *Le Monde*, June 2, 2025, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/politics/article/2025/06/02/french-assemblee-unanimously-backs-posthumous-promotion-for-captain-alfred-dreyfus_6741933_5.html.

Not everyone was happy, though, with what *Le Monde* described as the “symbolic and highly politicized return of the Dreyfus Affair” to public discourse.⁵ The centrist Democratic Movement party (MoDem) abstained, warning that the gesture risked offering the far right a “certificate of honorability” on antisemitism without forcing it to confront its anti-Dreyfusard legacy and that it would not participate so as “not to allow some people to buy cheaply” such a certificate at Dreyfus’ expense.⁶

MP Gabriel Amard from the left-wing La France Insoumise party (LFI) was even more blunt, taking direct aim at the National Rally (RN), the far-right party established in 1972 (known from then until 2018 as the National Front) by Jean-Marie Le Pen. After RN MP Thierry Tesson expressed support for the initiative, citing it as a response to rising antisemitism across France and the importance of defending the principles and unity of the Republic, Amard castigated the RN for “double-talk” on antisemitism. He warned that antisemitism was still rife within the RN and the legacy of the Dreyfusards was not the RN’s.⁷

That a nineteenth-century judicial scandal still commands the energy of the Fifth Republic reveals much. The Dreyfus Affair, more than any other episode in modern French history, functions as a drama through which France tests its ideals of justice, equality, and citizenship, and the distance between those ideals and reality. The Affair serves as a mirror and moral barometer, re-examined and re-engaged with at times when France doubts its self-image and identity.

The Affair endures and does so, as historian and literary scholar Maurice Samuels observed in an interview with the Report, because it dramatizes a key moment “in the *guerre franco-française* [the Franco-French war], a kind of internal war between the left and the right that started during the French Revolution.”⁸ On one side, a universalist France, open and civic, rooted in the Enlightenment and the Revolution’s promise of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*; on the other, a blood-and-soil France, Catholic, ethnically and culturally exclusive.

“That’s a battle that continues to play out,” Samuels explained, “and the Dreyfus Affair was the key moment in that battle, because it came at a time when the so-called ‘Jewish question’ – rising with the arrival of Jews in large numbers from Western Europe and [the intensification of the debate] about who belongs in France – came to the fore.”⁹

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In October 1894, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a young Jewish officer on the French General Staff, was accused of passing military secrets to the German embassy. The evidence was tenuous: a single, clumsily forged memorandum, the *bordereau*, wrongly attributed to Dreyfus. In December that

⁵ Robin Richardot, “A Symbolic and Highly Politicized Return of the Dreyfus Affair to Parliament [French],” *Le Monde*, June 2, 2025, https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2025/06/02/un-symbolique-et-tres-politique-retour-de-l-affaire-dreyfus-au-parlement_6610135_823448.html.

⁶ La Nouvelle République with AFP, “Why Does the National Assembly Want to Elevate Alfred Dreyfus to the Rank of Brigadier General? [French],” *La Nouvelle République*, June 2, 2025, <https://www.lanouvellerepublique.fr/a-la-une/pourquoi-l-assemblee-nationale-veut-elle-elever-alfred-dreyfus-au-rang-de-general-de-brigade-1748871498>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Interview by the author, October 11, 2025.

⁹ Ibid.



Alfred Dreyfus exhibition at the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire du Judaïsme, Paris, France, August 2025

year, following a secret military trial steeped in antisemitic prejudice, Dreyfus was convicted of treason unanimously in a court-martial, stripped of his rank in a humiliating ceremony at the École Militaire, where he was degraded with chants of “Death to Judas, death to the Jew,” and exiled to Devil’s Island, a penal colony in French Guiana, to serve a life sentence.¹⁰

His guilt was less a matter of proof than of societal bias. In *fin-de-siècle* France, to be Jewish was enough to provoke suspicion, and “many French people leapt to the twin conclusions that a traitor in the army must be a Jew and that a Jew in the army must be a traitor.”¹¹ Such a conclusion challenged a fundamental core of Republican universalism, which held that one’s identity and origin should have no bearing on determining one’s citizenship.¹²

The Affair might have ended there, had the real culprit, Major Ferdinand Walsin Esterhazy, not been exposed in 1896 by Colonel Georges Picquart, an intelligence officer. When the army attempted to suppress Picquart’s discovery, a small group of intellectuals and politicians transformed the affair into a moral crusade and national drama, dividing France not only over one man’s guilt, but over the soul of the Republic itself.

At the forefront of the public debate was French novelist, playwright, and journalist Émile Zola, whose open letter “J’Accuse...!” in the liberal and socialist Parisian newspaper *L’Aurore*

¹⁰ Ruth Harris, *Dreyfus: Politics, Emotion, and the Scandal of the Century* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2010), p. 1.

¹¹ Maurice Samuels, *The Right to Difference: French Universalism and the Jews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), p. 95.

¹² Ibid.

in January 1898 publicly condemned the army and the state as being complicit in framing Dreyfus and attempting to silence debate.¹³ Zola himself would be charged and convicted of libel. He was forced to flee into exile in England to avoid imprisonment.¹⁴

France became bitterly divided. The Republic split into Dreyfusards, an alliance of republicans, radicals, Jews, Protestants, and secular intellectuals, and anti-Dreyfusards, including monarchists, Catholics, nationalists, and antisemites, who claimed to defend the army and the nation from “cosmopolitan corruption.” The Dreyfusards believed they were defending the ideals of truth, equality, and justice, upholding the universalist values of the Republic; the anti-Dreyfusards viewed claims of Dreyfus’ wrongful conviction as an assault on the army, on the state, and on tradition.

In September 1899, Dreyfus returned from Devil’s Island and was brought to trial again in Rennes. Despite growing awareness of Esterhazy’s probable guilt, the military court once more convicted Dreyfus, sentencing him to ten years in prison, albeit with “mitigating circumstances.” Abroad, protests broke out, including in London, New York, and Berlin. Yet inside France, the mobilization was principally urban, intellectual, journalistic, confined to large cities like Paris.¹⁵ The government’s response to Dreyfus’ new guilty verdict was politically astute, if morally ambiguous, as it attempted to restore public order. President Émile Loubet intervened and granted Dreyfus a presidential pardon, but did not overturn the guilty verdict.¹⁶

The most dramatic turning point came in 1906, after further investigations and pressure, when the Court of Cassation annulled the Rennes verdict without remand, declaring that Dreyfus’ condemnation had been “by error and in an unjust manner.” Parliament then promoted Picquart to brigadier general and reinstated Dreyfus to the army with promotion to *chef d’escadron* (major) and awarded him the Legion of Honor in the very courtyard of the École Militaire where he was stripped of his rank and subjected to the antisemitic taunts of “Death to the Jews.”¹⁷

But the restoration was incomplete. Although declared innocent, Dreyfus never rose above the rank of lieutenant-colonel as he deserved for his service during the First World War, ultimately dying in relative obscurity on July 11, 1935.

The court’s eventual reversal in 1906 closed the judicial case but did not provide real justice. Moreover, its cultural and political significance was never resolved. The Affair became a template for French political and moral discourse throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, “a proxy for the question of what kind of nation France is,” as described by Maurice Samuels.¹⁸

¹³ Émile Zola, “I Accuse... – A Letter to the President of the Republic [French],” *L’Aurore*, January 13, 1898, p. 1, https://web.nli.org.il/sites/nli/english/digitallibrary/pages/viewer.aspx?docid=EDU_XML_ENG003560244&presentorid=EDU_XML_ENG.

¹⁴ Harris, *Dreyfus*, pp. 2-3.

¹⁵ Marc Knobel, “The Dreyfus Affair: Fractures, Memory and Contemporary Issues [French],” *La Régule du Jeu*, June 2, 2025, <https://laregledujeu.org/2025/06/02/43324/laffaire-dreyfus-fractures-memoire-et-enjeux-contemporains-dune-crise-fondatrice/>.

¹⁶ Harris, *Dreyfus*, pp. 3-4.

¹⁷ Knobel, “The Dreyfus Affair.”

¹⁸ Interview by the author, October 11, 2025.

It has been a trauma perpetually revived, each time reinterpreted through the anxieties of the age and serving as a mirror through which France can scrutinize and self-reflect.

Despite Dreyfus' vindication, the forces that had condemned him reemerged. The French author and politician Charles Maurras (1868-1952), the ideologue of the monarchist and nationalist political movement Action Française and virulent critic of Dreyfus, framed the Affair as the triumph of anti-France forces, presenting Dreyfus' exoneration as an anti-Catholic, anti-militarist, and anti-patriotic national defeat.¹⁹ This Maurrassian narrative appeared during the Second World War under the Vichy regime, which repurposed anti-Dreyfusard rhetoric to justify collaboration and persecution, portraying such rhetoric as a moral correction of the Republic's supposed failures.²⁰ Under Vichy, mention of Dreyfus was expunged from French textbooks and antisemitic material was disseminated. Still, anti-Dreyfusard rhetoric was not central to the Vichy regime's propaganda.²¹

When Maurras was arrested and convicted for conspiring with the enemy after the fall of the Vichy regime, he declared his life sentence was "Dreyfus' revenge!"²²

After the Second World War, the Dreyfus Affair largely faded from public discourse and was muted. Under Charles de Gaulle, stories of internal division and institutional failure contradicted the national narrative of heroism and moral clarity. Priority lay in national reconstruction, colonial struggles, and the broad narrative of Resistance and Liberation. The Dreyfus Affair, too divisive, too tied to the fissures of secularism, the army, antisemitism, and Jewish identity, was ill-suited for constructing such a national story. Dreyfusard interpretations of history were dominant, but consensus regarding his innocence and the miscarriage of justice still did not prevail, particularly on the right.

Into the 1970s and 1980s, Dreyfus remained a marginal presence. The naming of a school after Dreyfus in Rennes was refused. Films on the subject faced censorship or institutional roadblocks. Intellectual talk shows, a popular genre in France, avoided the Affair.²³ A proposal in the 1980s by French President François Mitterrand to erect a statue of Dreyfus at the École Militaire ignited a fierce controversy. Even Mitterrand's Defense Ministry opposed the idea.²⁴

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The Affair's return to prominence in the 1990s coincided with the surge of the French far right, which continued to circulate violently anti-Dreyfusard works, including at National Front gatherings where tracts denying Dreyfus' innocence and accusing Jews of conspiring against France and the Church were openly distributed. These texts, drawing on long-standing

¹⁹ Knobel, "The Dreyfus Affair," and Maurice Samuels, *Alfred Dreyfus: The Man at the Center of the Affair* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2024), pp. 160-161.

²⁰ Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 6-7.

²¹ Knobel, "The Dreyfus Affair."

²² Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome*, p. 81.

²³ Scott Kraft, "Europe: A Century-Old Scandal Haunts France's Army," *Los Angeles Times*, February 18, 1994, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1994-02-18-mn-24478-story.html>.

²⁴ Ibid., and Knobel, "The Dreyfus Affair."

antisemitic and conspiratorial traditions, presented the Affair not as a miscarriage of justice but as evidence of a Masonic and Jewish plot to undermine national and Catholic values.

The culmination of such rhetoric occurred in January 1994, when *Sirpa Actualité*, a French Army weekly magazine, published an article by Col. Paul Gaujac, a reservist serving as head of the army's Historical Service. It cast doubt on Dreyfus' innocence by suggesting it was simply "a thesis now generally accepted by historians." Dismissive of Dreyfus' wrongful conviction and ignoring the French army's attempts to cover up the Affair, Gaujac considered the controversy to have been an assault by leftists and radicals on the army that led to the dismantling of French military intelligence and defunding the armed forces.²⁵

The backlash was immediate and reignited public debate. *The New York Times* noted how strange it was "that French army historians should again cast doubt on [Dreyfus'] innocence in a study published to mark the centenary of his arrest."²⁶ *Le Monde* pointed to numerous blunders of fact and misrepresentations in the article.²⁷ Jewish organizations, human rights groups, and historians denounced the article as an act of historical revisionism by what they described as elements within the military still unwilling to acknowledge the institutional antisemitism that had condemned Dreyfus a century earlier.²⁸

The scandal was an embarrassment to the French military. The Defense Ministry disavowed the publication, and Defense Minister François Leotard fired Gaujac. Nevertheless, the damage was done, and the controversy revealed how unsettled the affair remained within France's armed forces, and how close to the surface and present the bitter disagreement between the Dreyfusards and anti-Dreyfusards was in French society.

Gaujac's dismissal was criticized by the National Front, one of whose members suggested it reflected "the misfortunes" of France.²⁹ The following year, as France prepared to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of the camps, the episode forced the nation to reconsider whether it had ever truly reckoned with its past, paving the way for the moral reckoning that President Jacques Chirac would undertake.

When Chirac stood before the Vel d'Hiv memorial in July 1995, a mere two months after taking office, his words marked a decisive rupture with decades of official silence. For the first time,

²⁵ Alan Riding, "100 Years Later, Dreyfus Affair Still Festers," *The New York Times*, February 9, 1994, <https://www.nytimes.com/1994/02/09/world/100-years-later-dreyfus-affair-still-festers.html>, and Alan Riding, "Feb. 6-12: The Dreyfus Affair, Cont'd.; A French Officer Is Accused of Betraying History," *The New York Times*, February 13, 1994, <https://www.nytimes.com/1994/02/13/weekinreview/feb-6-12-dreyfus-affair-cont-d-french-officer-accused-betraying-history.html>.

²⁶ Riding, "100 Years Later."

²⁷ *Le Monde*, "The New Dreyfus 'Affair': The Errors of the Army's Historical Service [French]," *Le Monde*, February 17, 1994, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1994/02/17/la-nouvelle-affaire-dreyfus-les-erreurs-du-service-historique-de-l-armee_3794596_1819218.html.

²⁸ Scott Kraft, "Europe: A Century-Old Scandal Haunts France's Army," *Los Angeles Times*, February 18, 1994, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1994-02-18-mn-24478-story.html>.

²⁹ Riding, "100 Years Later."

a French president acknowledged that the crimes of Vichy were committed “by the French, by the French state.”³⁰

The phrase shattered the Gaullist myth that had neatly separated the Republic from the collaborationist regime that rounded up ten thousand Jews on July 16-17, 1942 in Paris and sent them to their deaths. “France, land of Enlightenment and Human Rights, land of hospitality and asylum,” Chirac said, “France, on that day, committed an irreparable act.”³¹ He invited the nation to look backward without illusion on its complicity in the Holocaust, and, by implication, to reexamine the Affair that had once exposed the Republic’s deepest contradictions. Dreyfus returned to public discourse not as distant history but as a living moral template, a warning of how easily institutions could betray justice when animated by fear and prejudice.

Three years later, in January 1998, on the occasion of the centenary of Émile Zola’s “J’Accuse,” Chirac sealed Dreyfus’ return to the civic canon. He denounced the trials prosecuting Dreyfus as “charades” and the Affair as “a dark stain, unworthy of our country and our history, a colossal miscarriage of justice and shameful compromise of state.”³² Chirac made clear that Zola was a hero for standing up for Dreyfus, whose only crime was being Jewish. He said Dreyfus and Zola should be recognized for giving full meaning to the values of liberty, dignity, and justice, and for demonstrating “love of the fatherland against intolerance and hatred.”³³

Chirac’s words encapsulated the transformation of a national trauma into a moral asset. Only by confronting its failures, Chirac suggested, could France affirm its faith in Republican values, the same faith Dreyfus and Zola had demonstrated through their deep love of the country. *Liberté, égalité, fraternité* were now tied to the exoneration of Dreyfus; the Affair became the Republic’s moral turning point and its permanent test, a story of betrayal and injustice redeemed by the courage of men who embraced the values of the nation and the Republic.

In July 2006, on the centenary of Dreyfus’s rehabilitation, Chirac returned to the École Militaire, the same courtyard where Dreyfus’ sword had been broken and he had been publicly shamed, to honor him in a national ceremony.³⁴ In his remarks at the ceremony, Chirac reinforced the legacy of those who “refused the conspiracy of injustice and fought the battle of honor and truth in the face of adversity,” and thanks to whom the plot against Dreyfus was exposed.³⁵ He emphasized that the French Republic emerged from the low point of the Affair stronger

³⁰ Marlise Simons, “Chirac Affirms France’s Guilt in Fate of Jews,” *The New York Times*, July 17, 1995, <https://www.nytimes.com/1995/07/17/world/chirac-affirms-france-s-guilt-in-fate-of-jews.html>.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Jacques Chirac, “Letter from Mr. Jacques Chirac, President of the Republic, Addressed to the Family of Captain Dreyfus and that of Émile Zola, Paris, January 8, 1998 [French],” *elysee.fr*, January 8, 1998, <https://www.elysee.fr/jacques-chirac/1998/01/08/lettre-de-m-jacques-chirac-president-de-la-republique-adressee-a-la-famille-du-capitaine-dreyfus-et-a-celle-demile-zola-paris-le-8-janvier-1998>.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Béatrice Gurrey, “The Republic Pays Tribute to Alfred Dreyfus [French],” *Le Monde*, July 12, 2006, https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2006/07/12/la-republique-rend-hommage-au-capitaine-dreyfus_794629_3224.html.

³⁵ Jacques Chirac, “Statement by Mr. Jacques Chirac, President of the Republic, on the Dreyfus Affair and the Defense of the Values of the Republic in Paris, July 12, 2006 [French],” *vie-publique.fr*, July 12, 2006, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/162627-declaration-de-m-jacques-chirac-president-de-la-republique-sur-laffa/>.

than before, as it served “as the crucible through which the humanist values of respect and tolerance were finally developed.”³⁶

For Chirac, Dreyfus’ rehabilitation should be remembered as a national victory. It represents the unity of the Republic, the rejection of racism and antisemitism, the defense of human rights, and the primacy of justice. France, he asserted, must not take this heritage for granted and remain vigilant in the fight against injustice, intolerance, and hatred, which is never definitively won.³⁷

Chirac’s appeal to unity came amid renewed social tensions. During his presidency, debates over immigration, headscarves, and the place of religion in public life were already fracturing the supposed harmony of the Republic. Nicolas Sarkozy, who entered the Élysée in 2007, inherited Chirac’s moral script on the Affair but with a nuance. He considered it an argument in defense of a robust, secular Republic and against what he portrayed as the encroachment of religious extremism.

In doing so, he echoed arguments that surfaced in the public debate that led to the strict separation of state and religion in 1905. At the time, Samuels argued, “*laïcité* became a way to punish the Catholic Church for its role in the Affair, for fomenting right-wing nationalism and opposing Dreyfus. The [original] meaning of secularism was that the three major religions in France, Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism, should be treated equally. [Following the Dreyfus Affair], the meaning was expanded and secularism meant that the public sphere should be free of religion and that French Republican universalism demands the suppression of minority difference.”³⁸

François Hollande, in his turn, returned to Chirac’s path. In 2012, marking the 70th anniversary of the Vel d’Hiv roundup of Jews, Hollande echoed his predecessor’s first official admission of French culpability in the Holocaust under the Vichy regime, declaring: “The truth is that the crime was committed in France, by France.”³⁹ Though not explicitly mentioning Dreyfus, Hollande invoked the Affair at different times throughout his presidency, highlighting, like Chirac did, Zola and other citizens who had the courage to stand for truth and justice.

One such citizen was Jean Jaurès, a French socialist leader and member of parliament at the time of the Affair, who was one of Dreyfus’ most outspoken supporters. Hollande praised Jaurès’ commitment to justice, a core Republican value, which led him “to defend Dreyfus in the face of indifference and sometimes even hostility.”⁴⁰

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., and Gurrey, “The Republic Pays Tribute to Alfred Dreyfus.”

³⁸ Interview by the author, October 11, 2025.

³⁹ Scott Sayare, “France Reflects on Its Role in Wartime Fate of Jews,” *The New York Times*, July 28, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/29/world/europe/france-reflects-on-role-in-rounding-up-jews-for-death-camps.html>.

⁴⁰ François Hollande, “Statement by Mr. François Hollande, President of the Republic, on Jean Jaurès and the Government’s Policy in Carmaux, April 23, 2014 [French],” <https://www.elysee.fr/francois-hollande/2014/04/23/declaration-de-m-francois-hollande-president-de-la-republique-sur-jean-jaures-et-sur-la-politique-du-gouvernement-a-carmaux-le-23-avril-2014>.



Devil's Island in French Guiana

In 2016, Hollande inaugurated the Maison Zola in Médan, west of Paris, turning Zola's home into a place of remembrance and tribute to the author's life work and his courage in defending Dreyfus. The renovation of the house was a decade-long labor of love by the industrialist Pierre Bergé, and the first part of a larger project to establish a museum dedicated to Dreyfus as well on the property.⁴¹

Hollande described Dreyfus as “a patriotic soldier, victim of pure injustice [...] of antisemitism, of the worst humiliation.”⁴² Zola’s lesson, according to Hollande, is that everyone has a choice in a moment of adversity, that there is always a ray of hope in the darkest night, and that one voice can change the destiny of history by standing up for justice and sharing the same convictions that Zola and Dreyfus shared.⁴³

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Between 2020 and 2025, President Emmanuel Macron’s invocation of Dreyfus evolved from memorial ritual to republican catechism. More so than his predecessors, Macron made the Affair

⁴¹ “2011: Maison Zola – Maison Dreyfus [French],” museeyslparis.com, nd, <https://museeyslparis.com/en/biography/maison-zola-maison-dreyfus>.

⁴² François Hollande, “Statement by Mr. François Hollande, President of the Republic, in Tribute to the French Writer Émile Zola, in Médan, October 2, 2016 [French],” elysee.fr, October 2, 2016, <https://www.elysee.fr/francois-hollande/2016/10/02/declaration-de-m-francois-hollande-president-de-la-republique-en-hommage-a-lecrivain-francais-emile-zola-a-medan-le-2-octobre-2016>.

⁴³ Ibid.

a reference for civic moral instruction on Republican values and the fight against antisemitism, one cited often.

When in October 2021 Macron inaugurated Maison Dreyfus at Médan beside Zola's restored home, he declared that doing so was to “right an injustice.” Almost 500 artifacts fill the museum's rooms: photographs, court documents, personal objects, and press articles, connected to the Affair.

According to museum director Louis Gautier, the exhibition aims mostly at hosting schoolchildren and informing them of the issues of “antisemitism, racism, justice, the role of media and social networks, and the place of intellectuals in democracy.”⁴⁴ The museum attracted tens of thousands of visitors already in its first year, proof that history, when properly staged, could still command moral attention.

For Macron, the symbolism of establishing the first museum dedicated to Dreyfus at Zola's house was “to say that the Republic only holds together through the struggles of women and men. Never a given, always to be reconquered.”⁴⁵ Commemorating the Affair through Zola and Dreyfus, thus, was a lesson to teach the Republic to look at itself and remember that it only endures through struggle; it is not to be taken for granted.

When asked if he would posthumously appoint Dreyfus to the rank of general, Macron deferred, arguing that such a “repair” needed to be made by the French military, not the president. His reasoning – to avoid trouble and controversy and not to set a precedent of presidential intervention in promoting or demoting military officers.⁴⁶

Yet controversy was anyhow unavoidable, as always when it comes to the Dreyfus Affair. For France's far right, the Affair has remained a moral battlefield rather than a closed case. This was demonstrated in 2020, when far right polemicist Éric Zemmour, a Jew educated in private Jewish schools, claimed on national television that Dreyfus' innocence was not so clear, calling the affair “murky” and suggesting it would never be possible to know whether the allegations against him were false.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Cnaan Liphshiz, “France Opens World's First Museum Dedicated to Dreyfus Affair,” *Times of Israel*, October 27, 2021, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/france-opens-worlds-first-museum-dedicated-to-dreyfus-affair/>, and Ouest-France with AFP, “Emmanuel Macron Will Inaugurate the Dreyfus Museum in the Maison Zola in Médan on Tuesday [French],” *Ouest-France*, October 25, 2021, <https://www.ouest-france.fr/politique/emmanuel-macron/emmanuel-macron-va-inaugurer-le-musee-dreyfus-dans-la-maison-zola-a-medan-mardi-f41741dc-357b-11ec-89a8-4dd33f25dc35>.

⁴⁵ Emmanuel Macron, “Inauguration of the Dreyfus Museum by President Emmanuel Macron [French],” *elysee.fr*, October 26, 2021, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2021/10/26/inauguration-du-musee-dreyfus-par-le-president-emmanuel-macron>.

⁴⁶ Le Monde with AFP, “According to Emmanuel Macron, It Is Up to the Military Institution to Appoint Captain Dreyfus General Posthumously [French],” *Le Monde*, October 27, 2021, https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2021/10/27/selon-emmanuel-macron-c-est-a-l-institution-militaire-de-nommer-le-capitaine-dreyfus-general-a-titre-posthume_6100000_823448.html.

⁴⁷ Jon Henley, “Rise of Far Right Puts Dreyfus Affair into Spotlight in French Election Race,” *The Guardian*, October 30, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/global/2021/oct/30/rise-of-far-right-puts-dreyfus-affair-into-spotlight-in-french-election-race>.

Zemmour's revisionist comments were a deliberate provocation, designed not to reopen the judicial question but to reopen a cultural one. His France was a besieged republic, victimized by liberal elites and moral censors who were weakening the Republic and undermining its identity and pride as Dreyfus and the Affair had done.

His statement that “the innocence of Dreyfus is not obvious” functioned, moreover, as a coded appeal to those who felt dispossessed by the multicultural republic, particularly on the far right. “It was a dog whistle,” Samuels remarked, “a way of saying, I’m with you; I think this is a white Christian nation – even though he himself is Jewish.”⁴⁸

Such words about Dreyfus remain appealing among the far right and ultranationalists in France, but French politicians and intellectuals are concerned that once relegated battles over identity and history may resurface more intensely and legitimize hate and exclusionary policies contrary to the values of the French Republic.⁴⁹

During 2025, the concerns grew stronger. France was thrown into a period of political crisis following the snap legislative elections of the summer of 2024, announced by Macron in response to the success of National Rally in the European Parliament elections. The national elections resulted in an impasse of three major blocs: a left-wing New Popular Front alliance, Macron's centrist alliance Ensemble, and the far right National Rally. Difficulties in building coalitions abounded, and by October 2025, three governments had collapsed, shaking France's social, political, and economic stability.⁵⁰

At the same time, antisemitic incidents once again became an imposing, widespread phenomenon in French life, in particular in the immediate aftermath of the October 7 attack. In 2024, the Service de Protection de la Communauté Juive (SPCJ) recorded 1,570 antisemitic incidents across France, compared to 1,676 in 2023, 436 in 2022, and 589 in 2021.⁵¹

Macron and the French government unequivocally and forcefully condemned Hamas' October 7 attacks and affirmed Israel's right to defend itself. However, the massive number of civilian Palestinian casualties and growing concerns within French society about Israel's handling of

⁴⁸ Interview by the author, October 11, 2025.

⁴⁹ Saphora Smith, “From Museums to TV, Far Right Gives Dreyfus Affair New Meaning in France,” NBC News, December 25, 2021, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/dreyfus-affair-france-far-right-zemmour-macron-antisemitism-rcna8869>.

⁵⁰ Riya Misra, “The French Political Crisis That Keeps Getting Worse,” Politico, October 8, 2025, <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/politico-nightly/2025/10/08/the-french-political-crisis-that-keeps-getting-worse-00599112>.

⁵¹ “Data: Antisemitic Incidents Worldwide 2023,” *Antisemitism Worldwide Report for 2023* (Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry and the Irwin Cotler Institute for Democracy, Justice and Human Rights, Tel Aviv University, April 2025), p. 18, https://cst.tau.ac.il/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/AntisemitismWorldwide_2023.pdf; Uriya Shavit and Carl Yonker, “Voices from the Field: Neither Here. Nor There – Is There Any Place Where French Jews Can Still Feel Safe?,” *Antisemitism Worldwide Report for 2023* (Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry and the Irwin Cotler Institute for Democracy, Justice and Human Rights, Tel Aviv University, April 2025), pp. 27-32, https://cst.tau.ac.il/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/AntisemitismWorldwide_2023.pdf; and “Data: Antisemitic Incidents Worldwide 2024,” *Antisemitism Worldwide Report for 2024* (Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry and the Irwin Cotler Institute for Democracy, Justice and Human Rights, Tel Aviv University, April 2025), p. 16, <https://cst.tau.ac.il/antisemitism-worldwide-report-for-2024/>.

the war prompted Macron to recalibrate his policy, maintaining a balance between France's moral rhetoric, strategic calculations, and domestic political pressures.

The French government, while declaring Israel's fight just, called for humanitarian pauses in fighting, reaffirmed its support for a two-state solution, and urged Israel to act responsibly. That was still not enough for some on the French left.

It is within this context – one of instability, uncertainty, and frustration over domestic and international issues – that the acts regarding Dreyfus were undertaken in the summer of 2025. While it is, to use Samuels' words, "complicated to tease out Macron's motivations and not possible to know for certain" why he declared a national day for Dreyfus and why his party ultimately advanced Dreyfus' rank promotion in parliament, it has nevertheless been suggested he did so as a way to counterbalance France's recognition of Palestinian statehood through a gesture to the Jewish community.⁵²

No definitive evidence points to this being the motivation, nor does such motivation contradict the clear message Macron sought to convey by marking the date upon which "the spirit of the Enlightenment, the principles of 1789, and the republican promise finally triumphed."⁵³ One way or another, the message the President sent was clear. In the *guerre franco-française*, the victory of the universalist France, open and civic, rooted in the Enlightenment and the Revolution's promise of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, must be defended and prevail.

•••

The legacy of the Dreyfus Affair was very much present in Paris this summer, with the exhibition *Alfred Dreyfus: Vérité et Justice*, which ran from March to August 2025 at Musée d'Art et d'Histoire du Judaïsme (MAHJ). The exhibition returned not just to a historic scandal, but also to the uneasy moral conscience of the French Republic itself.

Curated by Isabelle Cahn and Philippe Oriol, the exhibition placed Dreyfus, the man, the soldier, back at the center of his own ordeal. Letters written from Devil's Island, fragments of the uniform torn from his shoulders, and the haunting precision of his prison notebooks were shown beside paintings by Pissarro, Vallotton, and Carrière, artists whose works once mirrored the fractures of a nation.⁵⁴

The museum's intent, as director Paul Salmona explained, was not remembrance for its own sake but a confrontation with the present, a reminder that the mechanisms of injustice are never entirely past. The objective of the museum was to continue to raise awareness and train a new generation of students in the values of citizenship, truth, justice, and secularism.⁵⁵

The exhibition's design moved deliberately from the intimate to the public, tracing Dreyfus' journey from his Alsatian childhood through the frenzy of accusation and the slow, bureaucratic violence of exile. The small desk where Dreyfus wrote to his wife Lucie, the stark isolation of his

52 Interview by the author, October 11, 2025.

53 Macron, "A National Day of Commemoration."

54 *Dossier de presse, Alfred Dreyfus: Vérité et justice*, Musée d'Art et d'Histoire du Judaïsme, 2025, pp. 4–6.

55 Paul Salmona, *Dossier de presse, Alfred Dreyfus: Vérité et justice*, Musée d'Art et d'Histoire du Judaïsme, 2025, pp. 22-23.

cell, and the riotous front pages of *La Libre Parole* were staged. In one of the rooms stood Tim's *Hommage au capitaine Dreyfus*, a monumental resin cast of the 1988 bronze statue depicting the officer upright, sword broken, eyes fixed on some invisible horizon.⁵⁶ It was an image of steadfastness rather than martyrdom, suggesting that Dreyfus' greatest act of defiance was his endurance. "I want the light," he wrote from his prison, a phrase that now reads less like a plea than a civic principle.

On the last day of the exhibition, tickets sold out. "Why the great demand? Do we have anything there that has not been seen before?" one of the guards was asked. He shrugged his shoulders. "Not really. But this is Dreyfus, and it is always a big deal here in France."

Policy Recommendations

1. **Context of Remembrance.** Whatever the motivations were, France and its President should be congratulated on establishing an annual national day that commemorates the Dreyfus Affair. When the commemoration is put into practice, it is essential for the following to be recognized: there are many lessons to be learned from the Affair, and all are valid and important. Yet its teaching must never lose sight of the root cause of the ordeal: the rise of modern antisemitism, which the Affair manifested, and whose ultimate tragedy it anticipated.
2. **Journalists and Democracy.** In a world where freedom of the press is increasingly threatened and the distinction between facts and fiction is more pervasive, education about the Affair must serve, across the world rather than only in France, also to highlight the essentiality of independent, fearless, and fact-based press.
3. **Experiential Learning.** Building on the Maison Dreyfus and the MAHJ exhibition, France should increase funding for immersive, curriculum-integrated educational programs that use museums, archives, and digital tools to teach students about the Dreyfus Affair as a case study in justice, prejudice, and Republican values.

– Dr. Carl Yonker

⁵⁶ *Dossier pédagogique, Alfred Dreyfus: Vérité et justice*, Musée d'Art et d'Histoire du Judaïsme, 2025, p. 17.

THE UNITED KINGDOM DEFENDER OF ALL FAITHS

On January 27, 2025, the International Holocaust Remembrance Day that marked the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, an impressive group of royal dignitaries participated in a commemoration event at the former Nazi extermination camp. These included the Crown Princess of Sweden and Crown Prince of Norway, the Grand Duke of Luxembourg, the Kings of Spain, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Belgium – and King Charles III of the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and other realms.

Joining Holocaust survivors, King Charles lit a candle to remember the murdered victims of the Holocaust and was taken to a reconstruction of the “Death Wall” where thousands of political prisoners were executed. Earlier during his day in Poland, he visited the Jewish Community Center Krakow, inaugurated in 2008.

Reflecting on his visit to Auschwitz, the first by a British Monarch, the King wrote in the visitors’ book: “Remembering what took place here and those who were so cruelly murdered is a duty; a sacred duty that must be protected. Being here today, hearing the stories of those who experienced its horrors, seeing the shoes of children whose lives were taken when they’d just began, and walking the paths upon which such cruelty was inflicted, is something I will never forget.”¹

Charles’ words had a special meaning not just because he is one of the most recognized people in the world, but also because his visit came at a time when antisemitism raised its ugly head in the United Kingdom following the Hamas October 7, 2023, attack on Israel. In 2023, The Community Security Trust, the main voluntary Jewish organization in Britain for combating antisemitism, recorded 4,103 antisemitic incidents, including 273 of assault; of these, 1,389 were recorded in October alone. In 2024, 3,528 incidents were recorded, including 201 incidents of assault.² With Jews attacked in unprecedented numbers on the streets of England merely for being visibly identifiable as Jews, there was some comfort in knowing that the Monarch is committed to the remembrance of the Holocaust and its lessons – even if his voice was not strong and particular enough in condemning present-day manifestations of Jew-hatred.

Tragically, towards the end of the year, Charles III had another opportunity to demonstrate his commitment to the cause. On October 2, Yom Kippur, a 35-year-old British subject of Syrian origin, Jihad al-Shami, drove his car into pedestrians before stabbing worshippers at the Heaton Park Hebrew Congregation Synagogue in Higher Crumpsall, a suburb of Manchester, the city with the second-largest Jewish population in England.

¹ Joe Little, “Sacred Duty,” *Majesty* vol. 46, no. 3, 2025, p. 36.

² “Data: Antisemitic Incidents Worldwide 2024,” *Antisemitism Worldwide Report for 2024* (Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry and the Irwin Cotler Institute for Democracy, Justice and Human Rights, Tel Aviv University, April 2025), p. 18-19, <https://cst.tau.ac.il/antisemitism-worldwide-report-for-2024/>.

Two men were killed as a result of the terror attack, both Jewish: 53-year-old Adrian Daulby and 66-year-old Melvin Cravitz.

Al-Shami, who was shot by a policeman and died later of his wounds, was arrested earlier in the year on suspicion of alleged rape. One of the three wives he was married to told *The Guardian* that in the months before the attack, he was “glued to his phone” watching Arabic news channels, but did not appear to be on the path to terror.³

Eighteen days after the attack, the 76-year-old King, who is being treated for cancer, paid a visit to the Heaton Park synagogue on a rainy, cold day. With a blue kippah on his head, he described the attack as “a terrible shock” that “saddened the nation” and shared his “heartfelt condolences.” The surprise visit, an unusual gesture from a man whose schedule is set for months ahead, was a show of solidarity intended to send a clear message against antisemitism.

The King spoke with witnesses of the attack, asking them patiently and compassionately about the tragedy as well as about Jewish rituals. He gave the congregation a gift: a bottle of whiskey to enjoy during the Shabbat morning service. In return, he was presented with a framed print of the memorial event the synagogue held for the late Queen Elizabeth II.

Writing in *Hamevaser*, a Hebrew-language Israeli daily representing the small Hasidic courts in the country, Asher Klein offered an insider’s view of how the visit was seen by members of the community. Typical of the genre of accounts on royal visits, Klein depicted trivial gestures with pathos and pomp, showing that the ultra-Orthodox are no less vulnerable to the magic of royalty than other people are.

According to Klein, the King was greeted at the entrance of the synagogue by the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, Sir Ephraim Mirvis, and by Daniel Walker, the Chabad rabbi of the community since 2008. Together with other worshippers, Walker held the doors of the synagogue and stopped the attacker, who was wearing a fake suicide belt, from storming inside with his knife and killing more people.

The King was informed by Rabbi Walker about how the attack unfolded and how the congregation deals with the pain and concerns in its aftermath. Walking across the synagogue, he was introduced to Yehuda Marks, who has served as the congregation’s Chazan for 35 years. He asked Marks what the duties of a Chazan are and how one learns to become one. He also asked Marks where he stood when the attack occurred. Towards the end of his visit, the King appeared to admire the synagogue’s Holy Ark and then silently listened to the Chazan singing El Male Rachamim as the rain was pouring on the windows.⁴

Yoni Finlay, a member of the congregation who was wounded in the attack while barricading the doors of the synagogue, and who spoke with the King during the visit, told the *Jewish Chronicle*: “To see the King come and say how proud he was of the Jewish community is just

³ Josh Halliday, “Wife of Synagogue Attacker Says He Showed No Signs of Extremism,” *The Guardian*, October 9, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/oct/09/wife-manchester-synagogue-terrorist-jihad-al-shamie-says-showed-no-signs-extremism>.

⁴ Asher Klein, “His Majesty the Emperor: The King in Manchester,” *Hamevaser Kehilot Supplement*, October 28, 2025, pp. 6-7.



King Charles visits Heaton Park Synagogue, Manchester, United Kingdom, October 2025

really something, it's just lovely to hear. And for the King to say that he's here to help us in just a small way is just a bit mind-blowing and quite surreal really. The King is here in Manchester, at our community, walking up the steps coming into our synagogue, and talking to us [...] to say he's glad to help. It's just surreal to me. And it's not in a small way that he's helping, believe me. It means a great deal.”⁵

King Charles' commitment to the defense of minorities is not new. Already in 1993, the then Prince of Wales made clear that the religious freedom of Jews, and members of other minority faiths, would be as important for him as that of Anglicans. In an interview with Jonathan Dimbleby, he said that in a desire to reflect Britain's religious diversity, he would be defender of faith rather than Defender of the Faith, the traditional title of the King in his capacity as head of the Anglican Church.

For a while, there were suggestions that the coronation oath might be altered. That did not happen. In 2015, in an interview with BBC Radio 2, Charles said he had been misinterpreted yet emphasized his commitment to religious pluralism as a part of British life, noting: “As I tried to describe, I mind about the inclusion of other people’s faiths and their freedom to worship

⁵ Daniel Ben-David, “King Lauds ‘Wonderful’ CST during Visit to Site of Manchester Synagogue Attack,” *Jewish Chronicle*, October 20, 2025, <https://www.thejc.com/news/uk/king-charles-visit-manchester-synagogue-attack-ygehfc2z>.

in this country. And it's always seemed to me that, while at the same time being Defender of the Faith, you can also be protector of faiths.”⁶

Making good on these words, in 2017, Charles was made patron of World Jewish Relief (WJR), the main Jewish overseas welfare charity, founded under a different name in 1933.

The King’s affection for Judaism and his participation in the fight against antisemitism have roots in his family. His paternal grandmother, Princess Alice (great-granddaughter of Queen Victoria and mother of Prince Philip, Queen Elizabeth II’s husband), wrote herself into Jewish history when she sheltered Jewish widow Rachel Cohen and her daughter in her Athens residence during Nazi Germany’s occupation of Greece in the early 1940s. On several occasions, the deaf Princess fooled suspecting Gestapo agents by pretending not to understand their questions about rumors that she was hiding Jews. She provided two trustworthy liaisons who helped Rachel Cohen maintain communication with the outside world, enabling her to discover that one of her sons had not managed to flee and his life was at grave risk. He, too, was given shelter on the third floor of the Princess’s home.

Yad Vashem recognized Princess Alice, posthumously, as a Righteous Among the Nations in 1993, and in 1994, Prince Philip travelled to Israel to honor his mother, who died in 1969 without possessions and was interred in 1988, finally in accordance with her will, in the Church of Mary Magdalene on the Mount of Olives. When the King visited Israel in 2016 to attend the funeral of former Prime Minister and President Shimon Peres, he paid his respects at his grandmother’s grave, too.

The King’s affectionate relationship with Judaism is also attributed to his personal biography. Like his father, he was a (often miserable) pupil at the Scottish Gordonstoun School, founded and shaped in the mold of Kurt Hahn, the anti-Hitlerian Berlin-born German-Jewish educator who fled to Scotland in 1933. Hahn sought to correct some of the damaging aspects of modernity, as he saw it, and based his schools’ philosophy and practices on adventurism, teamwork, tough reckoning with failures, a sense of duty to others, and the mixing of privileged pupils with non-privileged.

Particularly important was the King’s close relationship with Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth from 1991 to 2013. Sacks, born as the King was in 1948, is believed to have guided him on faith and moral-related matters. “[What made this friendship] wasn’t that Sacks was Jewish, but that he understood all aspects of religion, as indeed Charles does himself,” explained Ingrid Seward, editor-in-chief of *Majesty Magazine*, the primary publication for fans of the monarchy for more than four decades. “The King is a true believer in God and always held a deep respect for Sacks. When he [Sacks] died, Charles was profoundly upset.”⁷

⁶ Harriet Sherwood, “King Charles to be Defender of the Faith but also a Defender of Faiths,” *The Guardian*, September 9, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/sep/09/king-charles-to-be-defender-of-the-faith-but-also-a-defender-of-faiths>.

⁷ Interview by the author, October 23, 2025.

Jews around the world have a historical debt of gratitude to the House of Windsor, the symbol of British heroic and lone resistance to Hitler at the most critical of all times, when the Continent was preyed upon by the Nazis and their allies, the Soviet Union collaborated with evil, and the United States insisted on staying on the sidelines. Yet it is not a coincidence that a reigning British Monarch is yet to visit Israel. The initial support Britain granted Zionism, which made its actualization possible, was later retracted, and following the establishment of the State of Israel, British governments opted for neutrality in the Arab-Israeli conflict, in part for fear of the wrath of the oil-rich states. Despite the profound impact Britain had on the development of Israeli society and institutions, the Jewish state was never a serious candidate to join the Commonwealth. Royal weddings and funerals attain massive viewership when broadcast on Israeli national networks, but other royal news is usually ignored by mainstream media.

King Charles visited Israel three times, all as Prince of Wales and not on official royal visits. The funeral of Yitzhak Rabin, the prime minister assassinated by a Jewish militant three decades ago, was his first visit. Peres' funeral in 2016 was his second, and in 2020, he came to attend the World Holocaust Forum marking the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz.

The latter was, in retrospect, an unfortunate event that did not accord with the values for which the King and Britain stand – or, for that matter, anyone who cares about democracy and loyalty to historical records. To date, the only member of the Royal family who has been to Israel on an official visit is Prince William in 2018. His charm and good manners did Britain's image good, but also highlighted the decades-long snubbing of Israel by the Crown.

Policy Recommendations

1. There cannot be a stronger statement against antisemitism than a first official visit of a British monarch to Israel. Such a visit by King Charles III will also reflect pride in Britain's historical legacy at a time when it is needed. While it can also involve a visit to the Palestinian Authority and give voice to Britain's critical approach to Israel's current policies, an official visit will send a clear message that for Britain and the Commonwealth the right of the Jews to a national home is non-negotiable.
2. While solidarity following deadly antisemitic attacks is appreciated, the real task of British society and government is to prevent such attacks from happening. The King, like the rest of Britain, should more profoundly reflect on a reality that preceded October 7, 2023. While all religious minorities are subject to expressions of bias and hate, only Jewish houses of prayer, community centers, and schools are forced to be subject to intensive security measures, which tragically cannot be hermetic, and which even when effective impose a sense of exceptionalism and fear.

– Noah Abrahams

EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA

STAMP OF RECOGNITION

Despite the decline in their usage for the practical traditional purpose of sending mail, stamps remain instruments of public messaging and, as such, serve as windows to nations' ideological orientations. In issuing stamps, state postal authorities carefully select images, symbols, and inscriptions to present to domestic and international audiences themes they wish to commemorate, honor, and promote. They always say something about the politics of their issuers.¹

The process of stamp production varies from one country to another and may involve a range of governmental and non-governmental bodies, including ministries of communication, postal authorities, and civil stamp advisory committees. While stamps do not always constitute a direct expression of government rhetoric, they are subject to official regulations that are defined and influenced by politicians.²

Large communities of collectors still take eager interest in new stamps issued. For some nations, in particular small ones, the production of stamps remains a rewarding source of income.³

The global philatelic market is currently in the billions of dollars annually. According to a recent analysis by Coherent Market Insights, the stamp collecting market was projected to reach 3.75 billion dollars in 2025 and to grow to 5.68 billion dollars by 2032. Key factors driving this growth include increased global access to online stamp-collecting supplies, as well as rising interest among younger generations in cultural and historical artifacts, particularly in China and India. Yet, in other regions, the collector base continues to age.⁴

Stamps related to Judaism represent one of the most vibrant and diverse thematic fields in philately. Collectors of Judaica (understood by some in a narrow sense as artifacts relating directly to Judaism, and by others more broadly to include all Jewish-related themes) focus on biblical stories and heroes, synagogues, sites in the Holy Land, the Holocaust, and other historical and contemporary representations of Jews and Judaism. Over the years, countries

¹ Stanley D. Brunn, "Stamps as Messengers of Political Transition," *The Geographical Review* 101, no. 1 (2011), pp. 19-36; Stanley D. Brunn, "Stamps as Iconography: Celebrating the Independence of New European and Central Asian States," *GeoJournal* 52 (2000), pp. 315-323.

² Einat Lachover and Dalia Gavriely Nuri, "Israeli Stamps 1948-2010: Between Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism," *Israel Affairs* 19, no. 2 (2013), pp. 321-337.

³ Morgan Bourven, "Tuvalu, Nauru... Why Tiny Countries Sell So Many Commemorative Stamps," *Young Pioneer Tours*, n.d., <https://www.youngpioneertrips.com/tuvalu-nauru-bhutan-why-tiny-countries-sell-limited-commemorative-stamps/>.

⁴ Sakshi Suryawanshi, "Stamp Collecting Market Share & Opportunities 2025-2032," *Coherent Market Insights*, August 19, 2025, <https://www.coherentmarketinsights.com/industry-reports/stamp-collecting-market>.

with Jewish legacies – glorious and tragic, major and minor – have issued stamps featuring Judaica.⁵

According to Itzik Avital, a collector specializing in Judaica stamps, three main motivations are at play in the issuance of Jewish-related stamps. The first is the status of Jewish communities. Countries with large, influential Jewish populations tend to issue more Jewish-themed stamps, especially when state authorities seek to strengthen Jews' sense of national belonging through appreciation for their contribution to the nation's collective past and present.

Countries that desire to emphasize their pluralistic or multicultural character also tend to show greater openness toward minority representation in their stamps, including Jewish themes, regardless of the size or influence of their local Jewish communities.

A second motivation for issuing Judaica stamps is commercial. Stamps featuring Jewish traditions and history have been popular in particular among American Jews who see their purchase as an expression of attachment to Judaism and Zionism. Globally, the number of active Judaica collectors is estimated at several thousand. With potential profits high, even some small nations, for example, in the Pacific or Africa, with no Jewish history or significant contemporary Jewish communities, have issued Jewish-themed stamps.

A third, though less significant, motivation is the desire to enhance diplomatic relations with Israel, expressed through joint Jewish-themed stamp issues.⁶

The Gaza War did not markedly affect the overall scope of Judaica stamps issued in Europe and North America. Nine days after the October 7, 2023, attack, the Spanish postal service of Andorra issued a stamp (announced already in September) dedicated to celebrating the country's Jewish community and presenting the Jewish symbols of the Menorah and Magen David.

There was no Jewish presence in the microstate until the Second World War, when neutral Andorra became a refuge for French Jews fleeing the Vichy regime. Only a handful remained in the country after the war. A second wave of immigration came in 1967, when Moroccan Jews fled to Andorra following the Israeli triumph in the Six Day War. Today, despite regulations that ban non-Catholic places of worship, Andorra hosts a Jewish cultural and religious center serving its approximately 75 Jewish residents.⁷

Unlike Andorra, Greece is home to one of the oldest Jewish communities in Europe. In April 2024, the Hellenic Post (ELTA) issued a series of commemorative stamps featuring synagogues from across the country. The six stamps depict synagogues in Athens, Thessaloniki, Larissa, Trikala, Ioannina, and Rhodes.

⁵ Gary S. Goodman, "How Judaica Is Represented on Stamps of the World: Topics on Stamps," *Linn's Stamp News*, May 1, 2021, <https://www.linns.com/news/world-stamps-postal-history/topic-of-judaica-represented-on-stamps-from-around-the-world-topics-on-stamps.html>.

⁶ Interview by the author, November 3, 2025.

⁷ David Cohen Paraira, "Andorra," *Judaica Thematic Society Newsletter* no. 231 (February 2025), p. 9; "Andorran Diversity, Jewish Community [Spanish]," Correos, October 16, 2023, <https://www.correos.es/es/es/particulares/filatelia/productos-filatelicos/sellos/andorra/2023/jueva>; Ministry of Transport, Mobility and Urban Agenda, "Other Provisions [Spanish]," *Boletín Oficial del Estado* no. 239, October 6, 2023, <https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2023/10/06/pdfs/BOE-A-2023-20733.pdf>.

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Photo by Hellenic Post



Hellenic Post's commemorative stamps of Jewish synagogues in Greece, April 2024

The stamps were unveiled at a joint event organized by ELTA and the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece (KIS). ELTA expressed its gratitude to KIS, the Jewish Museum of Greece, and the local Jewish communities for providing photographic material that contributed to this series. It also acknowledged the Cultural Affairs Office at the Embassy of Israel in Athens for assisting in transcribing texts into Hebrew. The chairperson of the Greek Postal Company, himself a Hebrew-speaking Jew and Technion graduate, possibly played a role in encouraging the issuance of the series.⁸

In October 2024, the Belgian postal service issued a stamp featuring the synagogue of Arlon, part of a five-stamp series dedicated to the city's main squares. Arlon, the capital of the Belgian province of Luxembourg and one of the country's oldest cities, has a Jewish community that dates to 1818. At the time, the community represented about two percent of the city's population, but today, only around 30 to 40 Jews have remained.

The synagogue, completed in 1865 after two years of construction, was the first to be built in Belgium. Designed in a neo-Romanesque style, with two slender side towers and a high central arch above the entrance portal, the building stands prominently in the heart of the city and is

⁸ “Greece: New Greek Stamps Honor Synagogues,” *Jewish Heritage Europe*, June 30, 2024, <https://jewish-heritage-europe.eu/2024/06/30/greece-stamps/>; “Synagogues of Greece (3/2024) [Greek],” *Hellenic Post*, April 5, 2024, <https://philotelismos.gr/en/blog/synagogues-tis-elladas-32024/>; Less Glassman, “The Golden Age of Thessaloniki Has Returned [Hebrew],” *Shovel* 132 (March 2025), pp. 33-34.

considered one of its architectural landmarks. Designated as a protected heritage site in 2005, it underwent a five-year restoration and was reopened to the public in 2019.⁹

In December 2024, Germany issued a special postage stamp titled “SchUM,” commemorating the medieval Jewish communities of Speyer, Worms, and Mainz, which formed a powerful alliance during the Middle Ages and became a cradle for Ashkenazi Judaism.

The stamp incorporates traditional Jewish symbols alongside Hebrew inscriptions. According to a statement by the German postal service, the cities, with their Jewish community institutions inscribed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites, are “testaments to the rich history of Jewish communities in Germany and Europe.”¹⁰

Several Jewish intellectuals have also recently received philatelic recognition. In July 2024, Austria issued a stamp commemorating Stefan Zweig (1881–1942) as part of its “Literature from Austria” series. The Austrian postal service noted that Zweig “was born in Vienna in 1881 as the son of a Jewish industrialist,” and that his literary work was influenced by Sigmund Freud. Already in 1981, an Austrian-issued stamp marked the centenary of Zweig’s birth.¹¹

In April 2024, Hungary issued a commemorative stamp marking the centenary of Iván Szenes (1924–2010), a prolific Jewish writer, songwriter, and playwright credited with more than 2,000 songs, 200 plays, and dozens of television and film works, and a distant cousin of Hanna Szenes. The official statement regarding the stamp did not note that Szenes was Jewish.¹²

Also in 2024, Serbia issued a commemorative stamp as part of its “Prominent Serbs” series honoring Enriko Josif (1924–2003), a composer, pedagogue, and member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. Born in Belgrade to a Jewish family as Hayim Yosif, he became one of the country’s leading musical figures, celebrated for works such as Sonata Antika and Concerto for Piano and Orchestra. The official release highlighted Josif’s Jewish background, noting his Sephardic origins and that he is buried in the Jewish Cemetery in Belgrade.¹³

In September 2025, the United States Postal Service issued a commemorative stamp honoring Elie Wiesel, Holocaust survivor, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, and tireless advocate for human rights, as the 18th honoree in the Distinguished Americans series. The stamp highlights not only Wiesel’s role in Holocaust remembrance but also his broader contribution to the American ideals of justice, resilience, and compassion. “As a journalist, as an author, as an activist, and most importantly, as a teacher, Elie Wiesel chose again and again to speak for those who had

⁹ “Squares of Arlon – Non-Priority Stamps for Belgium [Dutch],” *Bpost*, October 21, 2024, <https://eshop.bpost.be/nl/products/pleinen-van-aarlen-non-prior-postzegels-voor-belgie>; David Cohen-Paraira, “Synagogue of Arlon,” *Judaica Thematic Society Newsletter* no. 235 (June 2025), p. 9.

¹⁰ “Special Postal Value Stamp ‘SchUM-Stätten Speyer, Worms, Mainz’ [German],” *Bundesministerium der Finanzen*, December 3, 2024, <https://www.bundesfinanzministerium.de/Content/DE/Pressemitteilungen/Briefmarken/2024/2024-12-03-sonderbriefmarke-schum-staetten.html>.

¹¹ “Commemorative Stamp ‘Stefan Zweig,’” *Österreichische Post*, July 17, 2024, <https://www.post.at/en/p/z/commemorative-stamp-july-stefan-zweig>.

¹² “Iván Szenes Was Born 100 Years Ago,” *Magyar Posta*, April 25, 2024, https://eshop.posta.hu/storefront/content/files/09_2024_EN_Szenes100.pdf.

¹³ “Prominent Serbs 2024 – Commemorative Postage Stamps,” *Pošta Srbije*, 2024, <https://efilatelija.posta.rs/en/product/velikani-srbije-2024/>.

no voice,” noted Ronald A. Stroman, a member of the Postal Service Board of Governors, at the dedication ceremony.¹⁴

Several recent stamps paid tribute to non-Jews recognized by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations. In June 2024, the Polish postal service issued a stamp in the series “Poles Saving Jews,” honoring the Kurpiel family from Leoncin that was murdered by the Germans in 1944 for sheltering Jewish families. Yad Vashem recognized the Kurpiels in 2013 as Righteous Among the Nations. The issue followed a number of other stamps issued by Poland since 2021 dedicated to Polish men and women who risked their lives in helping Jews during the Nazi occupation.¹⁵

In July 2024, Portugal’s postal service (CTT) issued a postal stationery (postcard with an imprinted stamp) commemorating Aristides de Sousa Mendes, a Portuguese diplomat named by Yad Vashem in 1966 as Righteous Among the Nations. The issuance coincided with the inauguration of Casa do Passal – the Aristides de Sousa Mendes Museum. Mendes, who served as Portugal’s consul in Bordeaux during the Second World War, defied his government’s orders by issuing an estimated 30,000 visas to Jews and other refugees fleeing Nazi persecution, risking both his career and his family’s future to save lives. This philatelic tribute forms part of Portugal’s broader commemoration of his legacy.¹⁶

In August 2025, Germany issued a commemorative stamp in its series “Women in Resistance against National Socialism,” honoring Donata Helmrich (1900–1986). Together with her husband, Helmrich sheltered and assisted Jews during the Holocaust by securing false papers and arranging safe housing. The support network she created in Berlin helped up to 300 people. In recognition of her efforts, she was posthumously named Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem in 1986.¹⁷

The 80th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, which marks the liberation of Auschwitz, inspired in 2025 a wave of philatelic activities dedicated to Holocaust remembrance.

In January 2025, the UK’s Royal Mail marked the International Holocaust Remembrance Day with a special nationwide postmark bearing the words “For a Better Future.”¹⁸ The initiative

¹⁴ “USPS Honors Elie Wiesel with a Stamp,” *United States Postal Service*, September 17, 2025, <https://about.usps.com/newsroom/national-releases/2025/0917-usps-honors-elie-wiesel-with-a-stamp.htm>.

¹⁵ “A New Polish Postage Stamp in the ‘Poles Saving Jews’ Series – the Kurpiel Family,” *Polscy Sprawiedliwi*, July 4, 2024, <https://sprawiedliwi.org.pl/en/news/new-polish-postage-stamp-poles-saving-jews-series-kurpiel-family>.

¹⁶ “Postal Stamp for Aristides de Sousa Mendes Museum [Portuguese],” *CTT – Correios de Portugal*, nd, https://appserver2.ctt.pt/femce/sku.jspx?shopCode=LOJV&itemCode=20246915199&utm_campaign=202407_b2a_fil&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_medium=paid+social; See also Filatelia CTT, July 19, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=864358445726292&set=a.447642577397883>.

¹⁷ “Special Postage Stamp Series ‘Women in the Resistance against National Socialism’ Donata Helmrich [German],” *Bundesministerium der Finanzen*, August 7, 2025, https://www.bundesfinanzministerium.de/Content/DE/Bilderstrecken/Sondermarken/Programm_2025/August-2025.html?docId=485008&utm.

¹⁸ See Royal Mail Facebook page, January 24, 2025, https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=638757231827890&id=100070808570890&_rdr.

aimed to raise public awareness of Holocaust remembrance and continued a tradition first introduced by the Royal Mail in January 2020.¹⁹

In February 2025, San Marino marked the 80th anniversary with a pair of stamps. The images depict displaced persons, symbolizing the suffering of thousands fleeing war, and bread, representing sustenance and the human fraternity demonstrated by San Marino's inhabitants. San Marino provided refuge to thousands who fled the Nazis during the war, including Jews, a source of pride for the small republic that, in the words of the official postal release, "transformed a moment of crisis into a universal example of solidarity."²⁰

In April 2025, France's La Poste issued a commemorative stamp entitled "Liberation of the Camps." The design portrays barbed wire against an open sky, symbolizing both the weight of oppression and the hope of freedom.²¹

Also in April, the Sovereign Military Order of Malta (SMOM), a Catholic order with a unique sovereign status that issues its own stamps, released a commemorative stamp marking the 80th anniversary of Auschwitz's liberation. It honors the victims while also reflecting the Order's mission of "building a society based on the values of dialogue and peace." The image depicts memorial candles lit during the official ceremony at Auschwitz on January 27, 2025, that was attended, among many other dignitaries, by the Order's Grand Master.²²

Since 1996, Hanukkah stamps have become a cherished tradition in the United States, used for sending holiday greetings and highlighting the Jewish community as an integral part of the nation's social fabric. In September 2024, the US Postal Service celebrated Hanukkah with yet another new stamp. "This stamp... reminds us – as Americans – that we are joined in our diversity," said Michael Gordon, the Postal Service's government liaison director.

Describing the stamp, the USPS official website wrote that "the story of Hanukkah stems from a struggle for religious liberty and human rights. It is a tale centered on the Maccabees, a small army of Jewish warriors, fighting for the right of all Jews to practice their religion freely." Around 167 B.C., "Emperor Antiochus IV engaged in a brutal campaign to force Jews to convert to Greek polytheists. The outnumbered Maccabees revolted, and against all odds, prevailed over the much bigger armies of the emperor."²³

¹⁹ Jewish News Reporter, "Royal Mail Issues Holocaust Memorial Day Postmark," *Jewish News*, January 20, 2020, <https://www.jewishnews.co.uk/royal-mail-issues-holocaust-memorial-day-postmark/>.

²⁰ "80th anniversary of the End of the Second World War," *Poste San Marino*, February 11, 2025, <https://www.dfn.sm/en/80-anniversario-della-fine-della-seconda-guerra-mondiale.html>.

²¹ "Stamp – Liberation of the Camps – International Letter," *La Poste*, April 28, 2025, <https://francestampphilatelystore.laposte.fr/shop/product/stamp-liberation-of-the-camps-1125024>.

²² "Holocaust Remembrance Day 1945-2025 – Commemoration of the 80th Anniversary of the Liberation of Auschwitz Concentration Camp," *Poste Magistrali*, April 14, 2025, <https://postemagistrali.orderofmalta.int/en/stamps/holocaust-remembrance-day-1945-2025-commemoration-of-the-80th-anniversary-of-the-liberation-of-auschwitz-concentration-camp/>.

²³ "USPS Dedicates Hanukkah Stamp," *United States Postal Service*, September 19, 2024, <https://about.usps.com/newsroom/local-releases/nh/2024/0919-usps-dedicates-hanukkah-stamp.htm>; Stamps Forever, "First Day of Issue Ceremony: Hanukkah," September 19, 2024, <https://stampsforever.com/events/first-day-of-issue-ceremony-hanukkah>.

In November 2024, Canada Post issued its seventh Hanukkah stamp since 2017. The postal authority explained that the stamp symbolizes “Canada’s cultural diversity” and commemorates the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem. The stamp features a photograph of a peacock-themed Menorah crafted in the 19th century in Poland and believed to have survived Kristallnacht in 1938.

Recovered and preserved at the Aron Museum in Westmount, Quebec, the Menorah stands as a symbol of faith and resilience. The stamp sheet further highlights this message with colorful Hanukkah candles and trilingual inscriptions in English, French, and Hebrew, quoting the traditional blessing: “These Hanukkah lights we kindle in honor of the miracles and the wonders.”²⁴



Hanukkah stamps from the United States and Canada

Joint issues of stamps are used in philately to symbolize friendship and enhance cooperation between two nations. In April 2024, Romania and Israel issued a joint stamp dedicated to the Hora, a traditional Southeast European dance.

The Romanian postal authority highlighted that the dance, introduced in Israel by Romanian Jewish immigrants, symbolizes human reunion and a “cultural bridge” between the countries. It also noted that Israel’s national anthem, Hatikva, has Romanian roots, with Naphtali Herz Imber starting its composition in Iași in northeast Romania in 1876–1878.²⁵ The Israeli postal authority, on its part, emphasized the enduring historical bond between the two countries and the role of Olim from Romania in creating that bond.²⁶

In February 2025, India and Israel released joint twin stamps celebrating the festivals of Holi and Purim. Their issuance was originally scheduled for February 2024, but postponed due to

²⁴ “Doorstep Postings: Mess Gadol Haya X.com as Hanukkah ...,” *The Canadian Jewish News*, December 10, 2023, <https://thecjn.ca/opinion/doorstep-posting-94/>; “Hanukkah 2024 – Booklet of 6 Permanent Stamps,” Canada Post, November 14, 2024, <https://store.canadapost-postescanada.ca/store-boutique/en/414273111/p/hanukkah-2024-booklet-of-6-permanent-stamps>.

²⁵ “Joint Issue ROMANIA-ISRAEL ‘Hora, Cultural Bridge between Romania and Israel,’” *Romfilatelia*, April 17, 2024, <https://www.romfilatelia.ro/en/joint-issue-romania-israel-hora-cultural-bridge-between-romania-and-israel/>.

²⁶ “Joint Issuance: Israel-India – Colorful Festivals,” *Israel Post*, nd, <https://services.israelpost.co.il/mall.nsf/odsbycode/1780?OpenDocument&L=EN>.

the Gaza war. The delay was likely related to political considerations on the Indian side, with the eventual issuance taking place during the January-March 2025 ceasefire period.

This was not the first joint Indian-Israeli issue. In 2012, the countries released a commemorative stamp celebrating their festivals of lights, Jewish Hanukkah and Hindu Diwali.

Official X accounts reported in 2025 that the stamps were launched in New Delhi in the presence of India's Minister of Commerce and Israel's Minister of Economy and Industry. According to *Israel in India*, an X account operated by the Israeli Embassy in New Delhi, the joint issue reflects the growing friendship and deepening cultural ties between the nations, as both Holi and Purim "symbolize resilience, joy, and the triumph of good over evil – values that unite our nations." Reuven Azar, Israel's Ambassador to India, noted that the launch coincided with 33 years of diplomatic relations and honored the "unique traditions and the deep bond between the nations and their peoples."²⁷

Photo by Israel Post



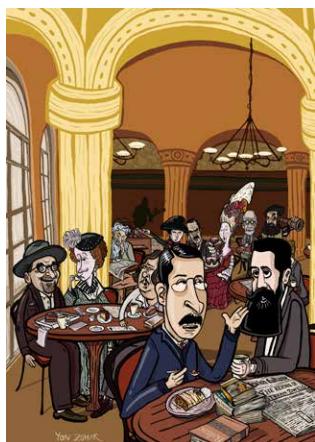
Holi and Purim stamps issued jointly by India and Israel in February 2025

²⁷ Piyush Goyal, "Co-chaired the 3rd India-Israel CEO Forum Alongside My Counterpart @NirBarkat, Minister of Economy & Industry, Israel," X, February 11, 2025, <https://x.com/PiyushGoyal/status/1889311492408742354>; Embassy of Israel in India, "Thrilled to Announce that India-Israel Joint Postage Stamp on Holi and Purim Was Released Today, in the Presence of H.E. @PiyushGoyal," X, February 11, 2025, <https://x.com/IsraelinIndia/status/1889305725899358445>; "Israel – New Issues & Joint Stamp Issues," *Joint Stamp Issues*, February 13, 2025, <https://philarz.com/category/countries/israel/>; "Joint Issuance: Israel-India – Colorful Festivals," Israel Post, n.d., <https://services.israelpost.co.il/mall.nsf/prodsbycode/1780?OpenDocument&L=EN>.

Policy Recommendations

1. Stamps are a catchy, artistic, and age-transcending means to learn history and the difference between history and historiography. Teachers are advised to use them, including in teaching Jewish history and the history of the Holocaust. They are also encouraged to organize themed-stamp competitions as a means of creative engagement with historical events, personalities, and concepts.
2. Despite the temptation to issue stamps commemorating the known and the celebrated, stamps can play a more meaningful educational and public role, including with regard to Jewish-related themes, in giving presence to the neglected and forgotten who deserve recognition. Establishing a digital archive of Judaica stamps would provide an important research and educational resource while preserving the visual record of Jewish life across continents.
3. Israel and its diplomatic missions should strengthen engagement with foreign postal authorities and relevant government ministries to encourage the publication of stamp issues commemorating local Jewish history and to promote joint releases that highlight shared heritages. Such initiatives can enhance Israel's soft power and improve its image beyond political contexts.
4. Jewish communities worldwide are invited to promote Judaica philatelic issues in their countries, engaging with relevant authorities to highlight their historical presence and contributions within local societies. Such efforts can foster positive representations of Jewish life and support social inclusion.
5. Philately is a space of cultural exchanges and recognition of the humanity that is in others. Young people joining the aging tradition of collecting stamps are actually joining something much bigger. So have them join.

– **Dr. Ofir Winter.** The author thanks **Itzik Avital** and **Yoram Lubianiker** for their invaluable advice.



STEFAN ZWEIG: THE CONFUSION OF FEELINGS

Stefan Zweig (1881–1942) reflects the triumph and tragedy of European Jewry. Born to an affluent Viennese Jewish family, he became the most popular German-language author of his time. Mentored by Theodor Herzl, whom he admired, he nevertheless rejected Zionism and instead advanced a concept of Judaism that has the world entire as its home. In 1942, he committed suicide alongside his second wife, Lotte, in Brazil, where he found refuge from the Nazi regime.

Zweig was a son of his times who transcended time. In recent years, he enjoys a renaissance in Israel. New translations of at least 20 of his works were released over the past decade, mostly by Tesha Neshamot and Modan publishing houses.

Some of Zweig's correspondences are archived in the National Library in Jerusalem, including his suicide note, in which he wrote: "I greet all my friends! May they live to see the dawn after the long night. I, all too impatient, am going before."

The following conversation explores Zweig's literary and intellectual legacies. The participants are **Harel Cain**, the most prolific of Zweig's translators to Hebrew; **Dr. Stefan Litt**, Director of European Language Holdings in the Archives Department and Curator of the Humanities Collection at the National Library in Jerusalem, and editor of a much-praised collection of Zweig's correspondences on Judaism and Zionism, *Stefan Zweig: Briefe zum Judentum* (2020), recently published in a Hebrew translation (Carmel, 2024); and **Prof. Uriya Shavit**, Head of the Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry at Tel Aviv University and editor-in-chief of the *For a Righteous Cause Report*. The conversation was edited for clarity and length.

Prof. Shavit: Will it be correct to say that Stefan Zweig has been the bestselling translated author in Israel in recent years? For sure among non-contemporary authors.

Mr. Cain: I think it is correct. Certainly, since 2012, when the copyrights for his works expired, there is a renaissance. Not only in Israel, but in other countries as well, although not so much in the German-speaking countries. I don't have exact sales figures, but look in all sorts of online forums for book lovers; every couple of days, someone asks for a recommendation for a Zweig book. And there are so many responses, and so many people say that they love him.

Some of his novels are really evergreen. I guess that is part of the reason for their success. They engage with eternal topics that don't get old. The psychology of growing up, for example, in *Burning Secret (Brennendes Geheimnis, 1913)*. Even if the values of society change, the appeal of the theme is everlasting.

I care mostly about my translations, which are of his novellas. Back in the 1970s, 1980s, I think his biographies were more popular. One recent exception is the biography of Magellan (*Magellan, Der Mann und seine Tat, 1938*), whose new translation was a huge bestseller (Modan, 2021).

Prof. Shavit: It's an amazing book. I watched the new Magellan movie (Lav Diaz, 2025) at the Jerusalem Film Festival. What a terrible, terrible movie. It reminded me once again that a great story doesn't necessarily make for great storytelling, for great art, and how big Zweig's achievement was.

Mr. Cain: To my shame, I haven't read the book. I know very well the books I translated, but I haven't read a lot of other things. Translations are kind of a competition. I don't read other translators' works. To my shame, I haven't read *Magellan* in Hebrew or in German yet, but I have to do it.

Prof. Shavit: If it was just the issue of copyright, then you have dozens of well-known authors whose copyrights have expired, so that's too easy an explanation for Zweig's recent popularity. So is the explanation that he is popular in Israel because he is Jewish. There are not a few renowned authors from his time who are Jewish and are all but forgotten today.

I want to propose an alternative thesis. And I say in advance: I enjoy reading Stefan Zweig, and I also don't like, in general, the patronizing argument that if a book is enjoyable and sells well, then it means the book is not good. Often, the contrary is true.

Having said that, I feel that Zweig is currently so successful in Israel because his in-between positioning fits the spirits of the few people in Israel who still read books, and who do want an experience with some measure of depth, but whose patience is more limited than it used to be. His works offer drama that borders on melodrama but usually does not cross the line. They combine 19th-century naturalism and very coherent time-lined plots with touches of 20th-century subtle psychoanalysis. They are outdated in a way that provides escapism, but are also not too far removed from present-day realities. And they are never too long. The reader gets the satisfaction of having read a literary work from cover to cover, but is never exhausted.

Has Zweig been that successful in other countries recently?

Dr. Litt: His literature still works very well in France. It works in Spain, in Italy, and even in South America.

In Germany, if you go into a large bookshop, then you have this table where you have all the nice, very thick editions of the complete works by Kafka, Tolstoy, and other canonical authors, and you will find Zweig there. So he is among the authors considered to be a good fit for this kind of entrepreneurship.

But he is by far not as popular in Germany as he is in Israel. In Germany, other authors appeal more to readers who are not nostalgic about the good old days. And let us not forget that the reality described in his books is mostly an Austrian reality. I believe he is more popular in his homeland.

The so-called Salzburg edition, the scientific annotated seven volumes of his complete works (edited by Werner Michler and Clemens Renoldner and published by the Salzburg-based Stefan Zweig Center, 2017-2023), shows that the urge to engage with his works, to come up with something new, even if it is not really new, is still out there. The only comparable thing in Germany is the annotated edition (Oliver Matuschek, Fischer, 2020) of *The World of Yesterday: Memoires of a European (Die Welt von Gestern: Erinnerungen eines Europäers, 1942)*. It is a very helpful edition that offers some new insights, and it is really too bad that it has not been translated into Hebrew yet.

Prof. Shavit: The thing is that in Israel, unlike in Germany, Zweig has never been seen as the sentimental author for high school kids who are not yet ready to read more demanding literature.

Dr. Litt: Yes. I can say with certainty that it is not possible to write a PhD thesis in Germany about Zweig. He is regarded there as entertainment-literature. As too flat. I totally disagree. I don't think he is flat. But of course, he is also not Thomas Mann. That is pretty clear when you compare the two, right?

Mr. Cain: I have this kind of weird guess that might also explain why Zweig is not as popular in German-speaking countries. And I have nothing to back it up. And Stefan may say it is nonsense. But maybe the reality of Zweig being driven out of Austria and his books being banned and his committing suicide in Brazil – maybe that's a deterrence for some readers in Germany and Austria, just like his Judaism may make him more popular in Israel.

Prof. Shavit: I would beg to differ, because if being forced into exile by Nazism was a deterrence for present-day readers in German-speaking countries, then this would apply to Thomas Mann as well.

I want to ask something about your translations. They are masterful. What I find remarkable about them is that the Hebrew is very much present-day Hebrew. And yet somehow, the German is vividly present. I cannot explain this achievement, but it is there.

Mr. Cain: I think that trends and fashions in translating into Hebrew changed over time. Back in the 1960s and until the 1990s, there was this intentional drive to use very literary Hebrew, very high language, including, oftentimes, when it was really not necessary. So fashions have

changed, certainly. I started translating books from German 10 years ago, and I was already part of this new kind of style in translation that rejected the high language.

Another thing is that my native language is Hebrew. I think that translators should translate into their native tongue. People sometimes wonder if I also translate into German. Not a chance! I wouldn't be able to do that.

I learned German not as some of the old-style translators, who grew up in Germany and Hebrew was sort of their second language. They obviously had a very good ear for German. You would think that that helped them. But unlike them, I learned my German at the Goethe Institut and then at the Department of German Literature at the Hebrew University. So most of my acquaintance with German literature is with old classical authors. And when I read Zweig, I don't have this feeling of, "oh, this is very old-fashioned German, oh, that's high language," that maybe native German speakers have. Zweig feels natural to me.

Prof. Shavit: Am I right that you are also unique in that this is somewhat of a hobby for you? I mean, you are in high-tech.

Mr. Cain: I actually don't know if I am unique, because I know of at least one more very gifted translator who works in tech, Erez Volk, who translates from, I don't know, a dozen languages. A very, very gifted translator.

Of course, it is very hard to live off a translator's fees, but doing it part-time kind of gives me the privilege of just picking the translation jobs that I want, and I was lucky to be offered to translate Zweig, although I wasn't some kind of Zweig fan before. But I kind of felt almost intuitively that translating him would be great, and that he would sell well.

By the way, in Israel, your compensation is not based on sales. In Germany, it is. But it's a good feeling to know that my translations of Zweig are being read by many people. I translated something by Rilke one or two years ago; I think it sold around 50 copies.

Prof. Shavit: There is something that puzzles me about Stefan Zweig. The abundance is just... I just cannot make sense of it. I cannot understand how it is humanly possible.

Within approximately 40 years, he wrote dozens of novels and short stories. And here's the thing. Most of them, at least those that I have read, are written with inner passion and intent. And care for detail. I almost never have the impression that he promised someone 5,000 words for a nice paycheck and wrote a story just in order to deliver.

Magellan – well, other gifted authors would have had to spend years just on the research. And it is just one of several undertakings of his that required incredible dedication for research.

Mr. Cain: He was not claiming to be a historian. He wrote historical fiction. I don't think that he even tried to be scientifically accurate, not even about names and dates necessarily. He was just a very good storyteller. So maybe all the research that writing *Magellan* took from him was, I don't know, to read two scientific biographies.

Prof. Shavit: But I would say that to be able to write about anything so vividly, it has to come from a very inner place. And you cannot reach that inner place in writing about historical events

unless the events you want to write about have been really immersed in your mind as real and alive. I don't think you reach that point through reading one or two works written by scholars.

Mr. Cain: And that is what people like. That is why they buy his books. You want to listen to his story.

Dr. Litt: I think we have in Zweig the very rare example of someone who was very much gifted and whose passion was the gift that he had.

He was not dependent on his success because he was very well-positioned economically even before starting his writing career. So he was able to transform his hobby into a kind of profession in a rather relaxed manner. He did not need to have a speedy success; perhaps that helped him have one.

Prof. Shavit: The point about his life of comfort, well, that makes his diligence even more impressive. Think of Balzac, the bankrupt Balzac, whom Zweig admired and whose biography he wrote. If Balzac didn't write so much, he'd be financially ruined. So he wrote. Which didn't help him much.

Mr. Cain: Compare Zweig to his friend Joseph Ruth. His good friend Joseph Ruth. A heavy drinker who was always short of cash. And Zweig was this rich, spoiled kid who was born with a silver spoon in his mouth, who was raised in a really affluent family, a family that had servants alongside even on vacations.

Dr. Litt: Apparently, he was really like Mozart. There is a legend that Mozart told a friend that his new symphony was ready, and he just needs to write it down on paper. I think the same was true for Zweig. Maybe his ideas were all so well set up already when he sat down to write them on paper.

Eva Alberman is the last living niece of Zweig's secretary-turned-second wife, Lotte. She is in her mid-90s and active in the preservation of his legacy.

She stayed with Stefan and Lotte for holidays in their house in Bath, England; she was really part of the family and part of the business. And she saw exactly how Stefan Zweig worked, so her memories are instructive if we want to understand how he managed to be so prolific.

So, his manuscripts were handwritten. Lotte typed the texts in four copies using carbon paper. And Zweig took one of the typed copies and went through it and made some changes, amendments, and additions. Then he gave that copy back to the secretary, who embedded the corrections in four new copies. He didn't produce many drafts. He actually once said that he produces only one and then comes the biggest fun of the writing process, what he called the 'shrinking it together.'

I read once that the original first draft of the manuscript of the historical biography of Marie Antoinette, which is quite a remarkably thick book compared to Zweig's other books, comprised almost 1,000 sheets! That means that he threw away half of it, more or less. He said that it gives him much pleasure to see how he can improve his own texts by kicking words out.

Mr. Cain: He believed that texts cannot have any superfluous parts. Everything has to be very compact and concise. I am actually not sure he always kept that promise. I think his style is characterized by sentences that kind of follow each other and repeat each other with variations. He was an advocate of being very concise, but I think he is not necessarily a good example of being concise.

Prof. Shavit: Think of other prolific authors – let us think again of Balzac or Thomas Mann. Unlike them, with Zweig you don't find those three or four pages describing garments or furniture, these cut-and-paste, or long artificial, uninterrupted speeches delivered by one of the characters. I do admire that about him. Perhaps his interest in Balzac was motivated by a sense of pride, pride in resisting the temptation to write-by-the-pound.

Mr. Cain: Well, I think after you translate a lot of stuff by Zweig, you kind of start to see his method; actually, he can devote a whole chapter to describing, I don't know, the hands of the gamblers in the casino in *24 Hours in the Life of a Woman* (*Vierundzwanzig Stunden aus dem Leben einer Frau*) or, I don't know, he quotes, kind of semi-quotes, a long speech about Shakespeare in *Confusion of Feelings* (*Verwirrung der Gefühle*). But I agree that he doesn't dedicate much effort to just describing the scenery or just kind of what people like or what they wear.

Dr. Litt: Indeed, you do have those repetitive elements, or those lengthy descriptions in his works, but this is not what we remember after we read them, okay? And this is what we definitely remember after being through a very long and exhaustive novel by Thomas Mann. Which is full of spirit, of course, and very intellectual and has so many different layers and blah blah blah, but it is hard to read, while Zweig's works are not hard to read. You have an amazing experience reading them, even though they are sometimes sad.

I admit that there are certain novels by Thomas Mann that I stopped reading in the middle because reading them was not an amazing experience.

Prof. Shavit: That is quite a confession.

Dr. Litt: Yes, but there are two or three that I really found thrilling. Still, I had the feeling, wow, this was hard work.

Prof. Shavit: Perhaps it is also because when you are compelled to read something for the *Abitur* (state matriculation exams), it is automatically categorized as, you know, not fun.

I have to say something in defense of Thomas Mann. I sometimes wonder whether the really dense, very boring and unnecessary parts in his novels are, in fact, necessary in order to lead you to those incredible climaxes that the same novels have. Where there is greatness in his books, well, there are few authors who reached the heights Mann did.

Mr. Cain: I tend to agree. Maybe you need all of this fluff, all of what you call the boring parts, to get to the climax.

Prof. Shavit: When I read about Zweig's main hobby, I couldn't help thinking about a famous quote by an Israeli football player. He was once asked, "Do you have any hobbies other than football?" and he answered, "English football."

Zweig's career was made of words, a total dedication to words. And then, what was his hobby? Collecting autographs and manuscripts. Football, and then English football. And I always thought that to be a great author, you have to have some passion that is external to writing, or else, what will your writing draw from?

Dr. Litt: I think that Zweig did have at least one major hobby, and that was music, but to the best of my knowledge, he hardly dared to write something about it. I would have really liked to read a biography by him of, say, Bach or Tchaikovsky.

Still, he was extremely attracted to the musicians of his time. He was in very, very good contact with Arturo Toscanini. He hardly missed any concert that took place around where he was living, and there were quite a number of them in Salzburg, of course, although he tended to escape the famous Salzburg Festival because too many people would knock on his door and he couldn't stand that. But otherwise, he was deeply into music.

He was also somewhat intrigued by the developments in the field of psychology and was quite good friends with Sigmund Freud. They had thorough discussions.

Very often today, I hear female readers of Zweig who say, "Well, there's hardly any man I can think of who so perfectly understood the psychological world of women like he did."

Prof. Shavit: Why was he so passionate about obtaining the original manuscripts of masterpieces? I mean, what do you gain from possessing Balzac's original manuscript?

Mr. Cain: I think he was fascinated with the act of creation, with the creation process, basically. With how others create.

He started with collecting autographs and moved on to obtaining original manuscripts. He liked to collect. He had, you know, Beethoven's desk and such things.

One recurring theme in his novellas is the character of the monomaniacal genius. Another recurring theme is the character of the obsessed person. Obsessions are a big obsession in his writing.

Think about the book collector in *Buchmendel* (1929) – that man is a living catalogue of books, but doesn't really know the content of the books. His brain is a library catalog, but he is only familiar with the metadata. Zweig was fascinated with people who could do one thing, but would do that one thing very, very well. And maybe words were the thing he could do very, very well. Words in the broad sense of the word, writing letters, corresponding.

Prof. Shavit: And he was a Jew. So here's a fact that emerges from Stefan's masterful annotated collection of letters in which Zweig related to Judaism and to Zionism: these themes were far from a main preoccupation for him.

I understand that he wrote approximately 25,000 letters and postcards in his lifetime. And the edited compilation presents just 120 correspondences located that engage with Judaism and Zionism. So in the end, if his letters and correspondences are any guide, Judaism and Zionism preoccupied around one percent of his time.

Dr. Litt: One percent of his writing time, let's put it like that.

Prof. Shavit: Since writing was more or less his life, it is fair to say one percent of his being.

Dr. Litt: There were long discussions with friends and acquaintances, which we are unable to reconstruct. We have no idea what was said in those discussions about Judaism, about Zionism, and to what extent.

By the way, you seem impressed with the scope of his correspondences, so I should note that most of his famous contemporaries, to mention again Thomas Mann, or Hermann Hesse, they wrote approximately the same amount of letters. So he was not an exception. And if you sum up all the emails that we write, I think the numbers are quite the same.

Prof. Shavit: Well, my emails are never two pages long.

Dr. Litt: He very often wrote a very short message on a postcard. Postcards were so common then.

Anyhow, I am far from being able to say that I have read the majority of his letters. I have seen and read maybe 5,000 or 6,000 or so, which is quite a number, but it is still far away from the totality of the corpus. And I am not certain that we will ever be able to reconstruct the complete corpus because correspondences got lost or, at best, still wait to be discovered.

Even today, I am sometimes approached by a colleague in the library who is cataloging a very tiny archive of a totally forgotten Yiddish writer from, say, Ukraine. And even there, we find two more letters by Stefan Zweig, which are sometimes not so overwhelming, but still contain new findings.

Having said that, the bottom line is that we do have a good sample because I can claim to have read about a fifth of the corpus of his correspondences. And that gives me a kind of indication about the extent to which Zweig discussed Judaism and Zionism with others.

So, we can say that he was intrigued by these issues, but as you said, there are many more letters in which they are not addressed at all. It is clear that his main focus is the literary world, publication. That was his preoccupation.

When analyzing the corpus of correspondences that engaged with Judaism, I see that definitely in the years of the Weimar Republic, between 1919 and 1932, he was engaged mainly with literary-creative aspects of Judaism, and less engaged with antisemitism or Zionism, which he turned to, of course, after 1933.

Mr. Cain: I am much less of an expert on this compared to Stefan, but I want to say that I found striking what I read in the biography of Zweig by Oliver Matuschek – by the way, I think it is a good biography, *Drei Leben* (2006, S. Fischer). His parents were not observant Jews, but they

did go to synagogue on the high holidays. What was even more striking to me is that their friends were all Jews. They didn't really socialize with non-Jews.

Zweig, on the other hand, kind of broke away from this. He had this network of connections all over Europe, and most of them were not Jewish. And I doubt that he ever went to a synagogue. So, in his self-perception, of course, he knew he was Jewish, but he really kind of left the Jewish milieu of Vienna that his family belonged to. Maybe his biographer is wrong, I don't know. But I was surprised by this aspect of Zweig.

You said that one percent of his correspondences were about Judaism. There is more Judaism in his literary writing. Of course, *The Buried Candelabrum* (*Der begrabene Leuchter*, 1936). The *Buchmendel*, who is a very charming Eastern European Russian Jew. The woman courted by the baron in *Burning Secret*.

Prof. Shavit: She's Jewish, you say! Never noticed that.

Mr. Cain: And a very beautiful Jew, yes. It is mentioned at the beginning of the novella. For someone who we feel was so detached from his Jewish identity, well, you can still see him talking about Jews.

Prof. Shavit: On the other hand, if you are living in and writing about early 20th-century Vienna and the German-speaking literary and cultural worlds, there will be Jews there whether you are a Jewish author or not.

Mr. Cain: *The Buried Candelabrum* is one of the texts I enjoyed the least translating. I think it is no fault of Zweig. I felt the text was written for a non-Jewish public to kind of explain the Jewish story. You have in that story wrong quotes from the Siddur that I tried to correct.

Prof. Shavit: It's not his greatest work, indeed.

Mr. Cain: It's not one of the best, but beyond that, I felt that for me, as an Israeli Jew, being kind of spoon-fed this introduction to Jewish history, well, I didn't need it.

Prof. Shavit: I find it interesting that you didn't mention *Jeremiah* (1917), the play that Zweig wrote while serving as a non-combative soldier in the First World War. It was staged in the young Yishuv in Hebrew at the Ohel Theatre in Tel Aviv in 1929.

Mr. Cain: I didn't read it. I know it exists.

Dr. Litt: It didn't work well on stage. It was long, way too long. The Hebrew version was shorter, per Zweig's request. But ironically, the original version was a bestseller as a book. People loved reading it. That is very unusual. You know, to read a play... I mean, that's not usually easy and enjoyable. Maybe you remember that from our school days... But in this case, it worked, and it was a bestseller. And that's maybe also the reason why you can locate today *Jeremiah* very, very easily in second-hand bookstores.

Prof. Shavit: The play is essentially about the end of the Second Kingdom, the end of Jewish sovereignty, and accepting the end of Jewish sovereignty as Jewish fate. Zweig was mainly

interested in the Prophet, whereas the translator, Avigdor Hameiri, was mainly interested in the fate of the nation.

Which brings me to the next point. Zweig reminds Israeli Zionists of a very uncomfortable truth. He reminds them of just how marginal Zionism was as a political movement, let alone as a practical mission, when it got started.

When Zweig was in his teens at the end of the 19th century, only a small minority of Jews in the world were active Zionists. A year after Herzl died, in 1905, Max Nordau lamented how, despite the massive grief and the great publicity of Zionism, only about one in 60 Jews in the world is a Zionist.

So on that fateful day in 1901 when the almost 20-year-old Zweig, the aspiring young writer, was accepted for a meeting with Theodor Herzl, then in his fifth year as the leader of political Zionism, Herzl was the exception in the Jewish world, and Zweig, who was not an active Zionist or even an expressed sympathizer of the movement, was the norm.

The vast majority of Jews were not Zionists. Some were hostile, some were indifferent, and some were undecided. The reason why Zweig was so anxious to meet Herzl was not that Herzl was the charismatic leader of Zionism, the so-called King of the Jews, but that he was one of the leading editors in the most important German-language newspaper, *Die Neue Freie Presse*.

What a meeting! It is described in *The World of Yesterday*. Who could be as theatrical as Herzl in creating a dramatic suspense before giving the young man, on the spot, what he never dreamed of having – the ultimate approval in the form of accepting his contribution for publication? And who could better describe this single life-changing moment, this father-and-son scene that synthesized regal patronization and noble generosity, than Stefan Zweig?

And yet – while Zweig admired Herzl and recognized to his last day the good that he had done him, he never became a Zionist.

Mr. Cain: Growing up in Israel, you learn that Herzl was the *Neue Freie Presse* correspondent in Paris who reported about the Dreyfus Trial and came up with the idea of a Jewish state. But nobody tells you that he was the editor of the literary supplement of that newspaper. And that was a very influential role for literary aspirants in Vienna.

Prof. Shavit: Reading *The World of Yesterday*, as well as Zweig's correspondences about Zionism, I sense a great deal of apologetics, and not very convincing ones, as to why he did not become an active Zionist or, at the very least, an expressed advocate.

One argument he presents is that he felt that to be involved in something, he would have to be fully dedicated to it. Thus, because his focus was writing, and because he saw himself as a man dedicated to universal values, he could not become a Zionist.

The other argument, perhaps a more profound one, is ideological. Zweig was against the transformation of Judaism into a nationalist movement. For him, Jews had a specific vocation in the world; they were a people of a *Weltgeist*. Their role was to counter nationalism and to spread about universalism. Their loss of sovereignty, their homelessness, their being above

the notion of territorially-based nationhood, was part of their identity, a part that should be accepted by them. I should note that these notions were not exactly original; Moritz Güdemann, the Chief Rabbi of Vienna and an opponent of Herzl, said the same already in 1897.

Dr. Litt: Zweig's position regarding Zionism was probably encouraged by his lifestyle, that he enjoyed so much his frequent travels and felt that he was at home in different places, whether London, Paris, Milano, or Buenos Aires, as much as one can be at home when not. Since he was an acclaimed author and a rich man, he was always welcome everywhere. When you are in that position, it is easy to feel comfortable in universalism; to feel that the big world is your home. Take away the success and the money, and you won't make it that far.

Also, he was maybe a bit repelled by the reality that Zionism was largely a movement of poor Jews. The rich Jews didn't usually support it back then. He was somehow fascinated by the *Ostjuden*, to whose world he was first exposed during the First World War, as did so many other Austrian and German Jews, but he clearly understood that their world is not his world, and was not a world he wanted to be part of. Perhaps he did not appreciate that his great mentor, Theodor Herzl, was doing business with those guys; perhaps he was not comfortable with that. That is just an assumption.

Prof. Shavit: In *The World of Yesterday*, Zweig describes how he accidentally ran into Herzl in Vienna, in a park, several months before Herzl died. Herzl felt Zweig was shying away from him and invited him to a meeting. Zweig never came. He explains in the book that because of his appreciation for Herzl, he didn't want to bother him, but reading between the lines, it is a tough sale. It seems that Zweig tried to avoid Herzl.

And tried for a reason. In a letter he wrote to Rabbi Alfred Wolf, who studied his writings (February 4, 1937) Zweig admitted that he originally engaged with Zionism as a debt to the confidence Herzl placed in him, but that because he always rejected narrow-mindedness, he never thought of Zionism as the one solution, with a definite article, for the problem of the Jews; that while Zionism is a blessed ideology, he would not like to see the universal, supra-national Judaism confined in between the walls of the Hebrew language and nationalism.

Dr. Litt: Zweig, as a person, was sitting on the sidelines. He was observing and never ceased to observe.

In the 1930s, he was good friends with Chaim Weizmann, and I think that the same story happened there. Okay, so he was fascinated by the leader and the intellectual Weizmann. He even gave him some advice about the writing of his autobiography. But again, he basically told Weizmann, I see you are doing this business called Zionism. I am not part of it, yet it is still fascinating to see you doing that.

Prof. Shavit: One of his letters informs that he entertained the option of collecting material to write the great epic novel about the Zionist Yishuv. But the letter reads quite clearly that this wasn't a plan that was ever meant to be realized, and in any case, that even in the context of thinking about realizing it, Zweig did not consider a visit to Palestine (letter to Egon Zweig, April 14, 1930).

By the way, I really like his sarcastic comment against 14-day tours in faraway lands by American authors, although there is at least one great book by Mark Twain that counters it.

Dr. Litt: I think Zweig was mainly explaining in that letter to Egon, his Zionist cousin, who was already there, in Palestine, why it was absurd to think that he could accept the suggestion that he, the famous author, should write the story of the Yishuv and, in doing so, tremendously help its efforts. Zweig refused the idea suggested by Egon very elegantly and very politely and said, Okay, to do so, I will have to research the life stories of so many people and to shrink them together to one very condensed story, which could have been fascinating to do, if only I had the time.

Mr. Cain: Walter Benjamin was offered by Gershom Scholem, who was certainly a Zionist and was here in Jerusalem and was his best friend, to come here and save his life. And you can see in the correspondence between them, which I happened to translate, that Benjamin just could not imagine himself living in what was then Mandatory Palestine; what would he do there? It was too small for him.

In the case of Zweig, it must have been even worse. He was this cosmopolitan citizen of the world. What would he do in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem, or Petah Tikva, of the 1930s? These places just were not appealing to him on a personal level. So maybe he was curious about this weird movement of Jews, but for him personally, no, he was not interested.

Prof. Shavit: Well, let's not forget that Herzl visited the Land of Israel only once. And he wasn't that impressed with what he saw.

Mr. Cain: Think about other German literary figures who did end up in Israel, like Else Lasker-Schüler or Arnold Zweig, and others whose names I cannot remember. They were something back in Germany, and nothing here.

Prof. Shavit: All of this reinforces the question of why Zweig wanted his correspondences, of whose historical value he was very much and somewhat arrogantly conscious, to be archived in the National Library in Jerusalem. That, at the very least, indicates faith in the endurance of the Zionist enterprise, and perhaps more than faith, perhaps also a sense of belonging, after all.

Dr Litt: I think there are a number of motivations that we have to consider regarding his gift.

When I first met this collection of letters, comprising a bit more than a thousand letters which he donated in the early 1930s, I was wondering, how did he make the selection? Because there were large parts of his collection that he didn't send to the National Library. So I wondered, what were the criteria? What did he choose to send?

At first, I was thinking too simplistically that maybe he sent the letters he received from Jews. But this was not the case. He provided the archive with letters by Thomas Mann on the one hand, and on the other hand, he did not provide letters that he received from Martin Buber, Max Brod, or Agnon.

I don't have a 100 percent answer, but I have an idea. In one of his postcards to Hugo Bergmann, the director of the National Library at the time, sent when the process of delivering his archive

was ongoing, Zweig wrote that he had already sent the National Library all the letters from the deceased correspondence partners. So, basically, it was a matter of storage space. When he was leaving Austria and had to restrict himself to like 20% of the space that he had before, then he had to make tough decisions. One was that he should give away correspondences with people who were no longer alive and with whom he did not have an ongoing dialogue anymore; people who belonged to the past.

That explains one portion of the correspondences he provided the National Library. The second portion were correspondences with people who were still alive at the time yet were very openly expressing their anti-fascist, anti-Nazi points of view. The assumption – it is not mine originally, but unfortunately I cannot recall who was the scholar who shared it with me – is that maybe Zweig was thinking that these letters must not fall into the hands of the Gestapo. Where could they be hidden? The best place is where no one would assume Zweig would send them to. And that's the National Library in Jerusalem.

Prof. Shavit: But if that was the motivation, why the National Library in Jerusalem and not, say, Harvard University?

Dr. Litt: Maybe the answer is given in a letter that he wrote to Hugo Bergmann on December 11, 1933. He wrote Bergmann that he thought that his donation would be a tremendous addition to "your library – our library." So you see that indeed, at that very moment, he saw himself as being part of the Jewish intellectual world, which finds its manifestation in the National Library in Jerusalem. And he wanted to be part of it.

That was actually the only time that he really gave a considerable amount of his personal papers to any institution during his lifetime. He never did that again. Not before, not after. With one exception: he donated the handwritten draft for *The World of Yesterday* to the Library of Congress in Washington. But that is it. He donated some of his autographs that he collected, but these were not his own works.

Prof. Shavit: That almost feels, you know, as the aging Jew who starts attending a synagogue. That a spark was there, as the cliché goes.

Dr. Litt: Yes, that sentiment was there.

As Zweig wrote several times very openly in his letters, he never hid the fact that he was Jewish. For him, this aspect of his identity was sometimes there, sometimes not so much so. Sometimes it was in addition to a certain point of view. Sometimes it disturbed him or confused him. And I think that in this he was not so different from many other people then, and maybe also now.

So definitely he saw himself as part of what was happening in the Yishuv, but to a point. There is one letter, I think it is included in the collection I edited (letter to the Viennese Zionist Dr. Marek Scherlag, June 22, 1920) where Zweig wrote that he had rejected Jewish nationalism because after two thousand years in which the Jews had plowed the world with their blood and ideas they could not restrict themselves to being again a tiny nation in an Arab corner.

Prof. Shavit: There is a wonderful story in the compilation of correspondences, a rather romantic one. How the lady by the name of Hanna Yakobson from Bat Yam rang the National

Library one summer day in 2016. She is the step-daughter of Hans Rosenkranz, a now all but forgotten author and publisher. As a young man, he corresponded with Zweig, who was already a famous author at the time, yet answered his queries with great respect and thoroughness.

Yakobson offered 30 of those letters between Zweig and her stepfather to the National Library. Now, I have to admit the story would be even more romantic if those letters were not known before. But still.

In *The World of Yesterday*, Zweig describes how Herzl, 20 years his senior, told him that had he not sojourned in Paris, he would have never come to the idea of Zionism. He explained how important it is for a young man to move outside his comfort zone. Zweig gave the young Hans Rosenkranz the same advice (December 10, 1921). He wished for him to spend some of his young years outside Germany in a country where the ‘Jewish question,’ as he referred to it, is not so intense. Yet he did not encourage Hans to travel to the Land of Israel; quite the opposite, he emphasized how important it is not to be preoccupied with the ‘Jewish question’ and that people who were preoccupied with it – he gave the example of Arthur Schnitzler – never fully grasped it. A year later, after Hans specifically asked him about going to Palestine, Zweig wrote in his reply (November 6, 1922) about a 17-year-old pioneer who died there of malaria, and his father, whom Zweig still occasionally met, was heartbroken. In that letter, Zweig reminisced about a conversation in which Herzl tried to persuade him to become an active Zionist, and the young Zweig declined. His explanation was that he had to be fully committed to what he was doing, and since he was committed to art, he could not commit to Zionism. Zweig advised Hans that he should not become an active Zionist as an escape from his disgust with Germany, but only if he fully believed in that ideology.

What can we make of all of this? That not only was Zweig skeptical about Zionism, he also discouraged others whom he cared about from joining the movement, and yet, apologetically so. His relationship with Zionism was not an easy one.

The chain of mentoring is also fascinating. Herzl and Zweig understood, and told their admirers, the intrinsic meaning of ‘no man is a prophet in his own town’; that to revisit reality and then change it, you have to travel somewhere else. Yet their sojourning led them to such different positions, and led them to lead others to such different positions.

It is the greatest of ironies that the correspondences that document all these thoughts are safely preserved today in Jerusalem.

Mr. Cain: Compare it to the ending of *The Buried Candelabrum*. When the menorah, the real menorah, ends up being buried somewhere in the Land of Israel, until the day comes when the children of Israel ingather in the land and find it. So while Zionism was not a practical thing for Zweig, it was a kind of ideal, a distant future mythology.

Prof. Shavit: With one difference; we know where the letters are. We don’t know where the menorah is.

Mr. Cain: Indeed. I said before that I didn't like that story; that it is spoon-feeding the reader with some kind of introduction to Jewish history, et cetera, but you cannot ignore a kind of very idealized myth of Zionism that is there. He could have chosen another ending.

Prof. Shavit: In writing about antisemitism, Zweig is very conscious of its dangers. He was not naïve; he did not think it would go away. But he does not search for a solution. His position in a letter to young Hans Rosenkranz, dated to the summer of 1921, resembles the ultra-Orthodox one: being persecuted is our destiny as Jews. Our tragedy is our fate; it is who we are. So here we have a man with a sense of history, but so passive about history.

Mr. Cain: I don't know if there is a reference in his literary works to antisemitism of the modern European variety. Even in *Chess Story* (*Schachnovelle*, 1942), the one text where Nazism is mentioned by Zweig, the victim is not Jewish.

Prof. Shavit: How do you explain that there is no rebellion, no resistance; that there is this acceptance of fate as if Jewish action cannot change it?

Dr. Litt: When Zweig wrote about something Jewish in his literature, he tried to place it on a meta-level. That contrasts with his contemporaries, for example, his good friend Max Brod. Now, you cannot compare Brod's quality of writing to that of Zweig's, but you have to appreciate that Brod never feared to put the cards on the table and say explicitly that there's Zionism and there's antisemitism, and we as Jews face a lot of dangers in our society and have to find a good solution.

Zweig, on the other hand, never, never, never tried to propose some politically concrete idea in his writings. I think he somehow feared that once he did, he would be burned as a very popular author; that his position as a sophisticated cultural figure that was above politics would be damaged. Politics was the last thing he wanted to be part of.

But he was not always passive. Hannah Arendt wrote a grim and unpleasant review about *The World of Yesterday*, in which she accused Zweig of having had such an easy life and never doing anything for the Jews. Actually, she didn't know the whole story.

One of the findings in the letters I had edited is that Zweig indeed tried somehow to intervene in the face of Nazism, not as a single person, but as part of a group, and on a very high-class intellectual level. Yet apparently, it was not really easy to bring 15 or 20 famous and outstanding personalities from the European Jewish society to sign a manifesto against antisemitism.

Prof. Shavit: Stefan, I want to say a word about that proposed manifesto as it is presented in a letter in the compilation you edited (May 7, 1933).

Zweig went out of his way to emphasize that he did not want whining. What he wanted was a manifesto in which German-writing Jewish authors defend their contribution to German culture, how they served it in a spirit of cooperation, how they added to its glory across the world. He was hanging on to something that by that point had vanished.

It is difficult to read that letter; you realize how little power intellectuals have in the face of evil, especially if they were not loud enough on time.

It is intriguing that the developments in Germany did not change his basic view of Zionism. They did not lead him to think that maybe, after all, Zionism was the solution.

Dr. Litt: Yes, but even at the moment he decided to commit suicide, in early 1942, it was totally unclear what would happen in Palestine. Things could have turned out very differently if the Nazis had managed to conquer Palestine. Note also that he killed himself just one month after the Wannsee conference, well before the extermination of European Jewry began in earnest.

Prof. Shavit: I was always curious, why did he commit suicide? Why the impatience to wait for the tide to possibly turn? I mean, he was a man who felt comfortable away from home. Is there still a mystery to crack here?

Dr. Litt: Zweig suffered from time to time from depressions. When the circumstances did not support his being and his well-being as an author and a cosmopolitan, it may have added to his depression.

I once read that he may have decided to kill himself after Brazil joined the anti-Hitler coalition. Perhaps he felt that his efforts to find a safe haven failed, that there was no place to go. He was really deeply frustrated about how efficiently and successfully the Germans were marching on. He and his wife committed suicide a year before Stalingrad [was won]. There was not a single sign that the Nazis would be stopped any time soon.

Prof. Shavit: So he could have committed suicide, you know, 10 days before the Nazis take over the United States and drive inward to South America.

Dr. Litt: Well, I don't know. It was a dramatic decision. It made a dramatic impression across the world. His suicide note is in our library. You know, there are phrases that he crossed out there. He was really a man of style until the last moment.

Mr. Cain: I base what I say on movies and books, not on first-hand research. But I feel that he was too lonely in Brazil. He was kind of fed up with everything. He wasn't that young. We say 60 is young, but back then, it wasn't that young. He felt that his career was behind him, that he wouldn't see the liberation of Europe in his lifetime.

We can only speculate that maybe if he had made Aliyah and came to Israel, the energy of the Zionist movement would have uplifted his spirits. But alone there in Persepolis...I don't think there was even a very big German-speaking intellectual circle around him there.

Prof. Shavit: *The World of Yesterday*, which he wrote shortly before he committed suicide, is not a bitter book. Reading it, you don't sense a person who is very depressed or alienated from the life that he left behind him.

Dr. Litt: But it is also not a very nostalgic book. It is just a good autobiography. Actually, not so much a biography, more a picture of his times.

To write a proper autobiography, he would have had to address personal issues. His wives are not mentioned in *The World of Yesterday*, correct? He was dealing with the macro, not the micro.

Prof. Shavit: I guess that has to do with the spirit of the time. You don't really write about personal issues directly. Well, it's not as if Germans or Austrians today are very comfortable discussing their personal lives.

Mr. Cain: He wrote to Walter Benjamin to tell him that he had divorced his first wife. He mentioned it in a kind of a postscript at the end of a very long letter, kind of, oh, by the way, I divorced my wife.

Prof. Shavit: When people reconstruct their lives, they write from the point of view of the present. Yet in *The World of Yesterday*, Zweig doesn't understand his Judaism differently than he did before the rise of Nazism. When you read his letters from before the rise of Nazism, he insists on a very internationalist, almost elusive definition of Judaism. He does not want Judaism to define him and confine him. I am curious that towards the end of his life, when he reflected upon his adulthood, he did not revise or critically reflect upon his understanding of what it meant to be a Jew.

Dr. Litt: He created an aura around himself, and he had a name to lose. He was by no means seeking this opportunity, this final deed, to Judaize himself publicly.

You can see that even in the last letter that I included in the book (September/October 1941), sent to a reform rabbi in Rio de Janeiro, Henrique Lemle. Zweig gently thanked him for the kind invitation to take an active part in a Yom Kippur prayer in his synagogue, but noted that his modest education in religious matters, which he described as typical to Austrian Jews, made him too insecure to participate. He declined the invitation.

Prof. Shavit: Stefan, what is your favorite Zweig story?

Dr. Litt: His best work is, in my opinion, the novel he never intended to publish that was published posthumously in 1982 – *The Post Office Girl (Rausch der Verwandlung)*. It is better, in my opinion, than the novel he did publish, his longest work, *Beware of Pity (Ungeduld des Herzens, 1939)*. My favorite short story is *Letter from an Unknown Woman (Brief einer Unbekannten, 1922)*. I really love it because I see something very personal there from Zweig, and maybe a kind of confession, an unpleasant confession, about his own behavior when he was a young, rich, and spoiled gentleman. He wrote it when he was in his early 40s, and I think he was reminiscing about his behavior as a young man. The author who gets the letter from the woman is 41; I don't think that is a coincidence.

Mr. Cain: I also like *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, which I happened to translate when I was 41. I want to choose two more. One is *Burning Secret*. This 12-year-old child with his mother in this posh hotel may be Zweig kind of remembering his childhood. And this baron, who tries to court the woman, maybe Zweig sees himself in him. It is a very good psychological novella about growing up, realizing what the world of adults is about.

The other one that I like a lot is very different from all his other works, and influenced by Herman Hesse, *The Eyes of the Eternal Brother (Die Augen des ewigen Bruders, 1922)*. India was trendy back then. And I find the legend beautiful.

Prof. Shavit: We cannot end without a short literary experiment. If Zweig was alive today and landed in Vienna, how would he feel?

Dr. Litt: I am not an expert on present-day Vienna. Still, my feeling is that the mindsets of the big cities in Austria are still very much related to a reality that has long gone. Vienna definitely still has the spirit of being the capital of an empire; an empire that isn't there anymore.

Prof. Shavit: Not even the best place in the world for an Apfelstrudel, if my experience is any guide.

Mr. Cain: I think that if Zweig had to choose between present-day Austria and present-day Israel, he would choose Austria, obviously.

Prof. Shavit: What would Zweig think of Tel Aviv if our resurrecting machine worked? I think that for someone who was so interested in humanity, in human weaknesses and obsessions, Tel Aviv could be an interesting place.

Mr. Cain: It is a very political question nowadays, and it's very hard to answer now with what's going on in Gaza. But if we go back to better times, we can speculate that he would have been proud of Israel's achievements in science, or Agnon winning the Nobel Prize.

Dr. Litt: Perhaps he would have come to the conclusion that the concern he articulated in one of the letters we addressed before was realized. That it is impossible for the Jews, after all they had done in the world and for the world, to become a tiny nation in an Arab corner. My feeling is that this is exactly what is happening. Unfortunately, I see that there are so many efforts by the state to limit the intellectual world of this country to a very tiny level, focused on itself, not part of something bigger, which in fact we are. And that there are more and more parts of the population in this country that follow this path.

Prof. Shavit: Stefan, if that resurrection machine brings Zweig to Tel Aviv, I would like the three of us to sit with him at "Stefan," the small and flourishing Viennese Café on Tchernichovsky Street, opened by an Austrian who fell in love with an Israeli and settled here. There is so much to discuss. It can be a great start for a thrilling short story, especially if Zweig were to write it.

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