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## An EU for Israel/Palestine

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By Wayne-Daniel Berard

***only that victory endures in consequence  
of which no one is defeated.***

*Sikh prayer for peace.*

My father still can't believe it. A D-Day vet, he shakes his head every time the term "European Union" comes up on television or in the paper. "I'd have bet my life," he says, "that England, France and Germany would never have anything to do with one another -- except to slaughter each other." So why can't the impossible happen for Israel/Palestine?

Yitzhak Frankenthal, founder of Parents' Circle (who lost a nineteen-year-old soldier-son to Hamas) succinctly writes,

*The Israeli dream has been to create a country from the river to the sea in security and peace. The Palestinian dream is to destroy the Israelis and to have all the land as a Palestinian state. (1)*

Sounds remarkably like the dreams (distant and recent) of antagonists in Europe and Ireland? How often has one people sought to "secure a state" from one sea or another (Irish? Baltic? Black?) to some river or another (Liffy? Elbe? Volga?), while its counterpart has been just as bent on destroying, not just that state, but the people it represents? Frankenthal goes on to say that, "Both need to compromise their dreams." But aren't the successes of the EU and of Northern Ireland about something else altogether? "Compromise" is the act of each side giving up something to gain something else (as in "land for peace"). For Israel/Palestine, this has proved largely unworkable. But in the European model, almost nothing is given up, and the "something else"-- that which seemed utterly impossible one war ago, peace, cooperation, a shared life without loss of individual identity -- is still gained. No member state or people is asked to compromise its dream; instead, a "co-promise" is extended, each to the other, rather more like a marriage than an accord or roadmap.

What would an EU-style future for Israel/Palestine look like? First, it would be one in which the cherished dreams of both people are, in a sense, accomplished.

Imagine a Union of two independent states, Israel and Palestine. As with the EU, each retains its sovereignty, entering into voluntary, mutually beneficial union with the other. Each state preserves its own identity, laws and institutions. As with Europe, borders ("safe and secure") become increasingly irrelevant. Each state is free to maintain its own armed services (as is the case with Europe), but might share an Interpol-like force for the purpose of fighting crime, including terrorism (a scoffable notion? But today, the dread Royal Ulster Constabulary is being successfully reconstituted as an all-Ulster police force). In terms of governance, much from the EU and the new Northern Irish models could apply: a Union Parliament (perhaps with an additional chamber not population-determined, a la the US Senate), a rotating Presidency, with the Union's number two post held by the other member state, a Union Court -- the powers of all of which would be decided by the two member states and delineated in the Union's Constitution.

Water use could be regulated and systems maintained by a Union commission comprised equally of members from both states, perhaps with a jointly agreed-upon third set of representatives to prevent deadlock.

The previously deal-killing (and deadly) issues of settlements and return would likewise begin to dwindle in importance. In the EU, a Dane may live in Athens or a Portuguese in Ljubljana; each would vote for their home state's EMP's, but not in the elections of Greece or Slovenia. Each is an EU citizen and a

citizen of his/her home state, but not of any other member state in which he or she may dwell (unless citizenship there is sought and secured). In the same way, it would make little legal difference if Jewish settlers lived in Palestine or Palestinians returned to Israel. Their constitutional voice and influence would be reserved for the Union's Parliament and for the elected officials of their home state. A democratic Jewish nation would no longer need to equate "return" with being voted out of existence, nor would Palestine need concern itself with Jews "settling their way" to a "greater Israel." (Unlike the case with the EU, security and overpopulation concerns might make it necessary for each member to limit its number of residents from the other, initially at least. But then, no serious proponent of Jewish settlement or Palestinian return has ever advocated a completely unregulated flow of either).

As for Jerusalem, the status of a Brussels could be applied and modified here. Just as that city is the Belgian and EU capital, so could the Holy City become the seat of government of all three entities, Israel, Palestine and the Union, with, generally speaking, its administration in the hands of the Union. In essence, each people would have fulfilled its dream, but jointly, rather than in acts of mutually violent exclusion. Each wishes the land to be theirs, and, via Union, for both it would be so. Each wishes to preserve or obtain its own sovereignty; each would do so. And, perhaps just as importantly, the inextricably joined economies of both Israel and Palestine would be allowed to expand and flourish in the only way possible: together.

America would doubtless have a role to play in the birth of such a Union, as facilitator and promoter. But the work of actually partnering and mid-wifing Israel and Palestine through this process would surely fall to the Europeans (who are, after all, the experts). With a nuclear Iran and a new American president on the horizon, mightn't urgency and opportunity finally combine to create an openness to new solutions? An IPU, an Israeli/Palestinian Union -- an impossible dream? Too much hatred ingrained, too much blood spilled between Palestinians and Israelis for it to be anything else? Consider this story, which I heard from an Irish native: A man stands on a Belfast street corner late at night, seeking a taxi. Suddenly, he feels a pistol in his back and hears a voice ask, "Are you Catholic or are you Protestant?" Thinking fast, the man replies, "I'm a Jew." As the hammer clicks back and the trigger's pulled, the voice behind him says, "And I'm the luckiest Arab in all Belfast." A hopeless bit of theater on the reality of violence as way of life? But today, Ian Paisley is First Minister and Martin McGuinness Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland, where those of different faiths had been killing each other, not for fifty-nine, but for over three hundred years. Or put another way: Imagine my father at nineteen, crawling his way over the bodies of his mates, his brothers. He stares up at the cliffs of Omaha Beach, higher and more deadly than any wall, and comes away convinced that Europe was and could never be anything but a 400,000 square-mile excuse for mass murder. Yet, in this same man's lifetime, on that same continent, victories in which no one is defeated are being achieved. They are the only kind that can endure. For Ireland, for Europe. For Israel, for Palestine.

#### **Notes**

1) Frankenthal, Yitzhak. *Compromise for Peace*. From *Tikkun Reader*, Twentieth Anniversary. Ed. Michael Lerner. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing, Inc. 2007, p. 235