

## **Diplomacy and Lobby: European Union-Israel Relations**

### **The Influence of the Lobby Activities on the Political and Economic Relations between European Union and Israel on the Background of the Israel-Palestine Conflict**

#### **Abstract**

The topic of security in the Middle East remains one of the most discussed ones in the big forums on international relations all around the world, but especially in the United States of America and in Europe. The long years of conflict in the region that were generated by the establishment of the State of Israel and the further developments in relation to it challenged the creativity of politicians, members of the academic world, experts and citizens in order to design a solution that would lead to the end of the conflict. The context generated by the victory of Israel in the 1967 Six Day War and the existence of the Occupied Territories (OT) led to, in many regards, an amplification of many issues already existing in relation to this topic, as well as to the existence of new ones. Also, the new context led to a more active relationship between Israel and the United States. Later, the fall of the Iron Curtain, the establishing the European Union (EU) through the Maastricht Treaty led to the involvement of new, more visible actor in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The very existence of the EU as a civilian power based on values like the respect for the human rights and for the humanitarian international law created a new dynamic in regard to Israel as an international actor. Although opposing the existence of the OT, as well as policies attached to it, like the policy of building new settlements, the new context had a positive start. The signing of the Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation generated a context that was regarded by the EU as proper for further improvements of the political relations between the EU and Israel. During this period, often encountered in the related literature as the “honeymoon” between the EU and Israel, a set of significant improvements in the relations between the two emerged. The main contribution of the Oslo Accords – which eventually opened the door for the EU’s involvement – was that they ‘established the framework wherein all final ‘status issues’ were to be resolved and provided for the creation of a Palestinian National Authority which would administer territories under its

control' (Goldstein 2014). Moreover, in the framework of Oslo Accords "the PLO recognized Israel's right to exist in peace and security whilst it gained the Israel's recognition as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people in return" (Müller 2014). Another element of the Oslo Accords that connected them to the spirit of the EU involvement was represented by what was perceived to be fueling the conflict between the two sides: 'the lack of mutual recognition of national rights' (Rynhold 2007). As the research will further illustrate, this lack was the main element not allowing the liberal approach of using a deterrent in order to contribute to building peace in the two countries.

On the other side, the EU was over-attached to the whole Oslo Process as it represented a very good opportunity for it to present itself as a relevant political player in the region. Moreover, through its whole political and economic investment in the PA, a failure of the Oslo Accords would have meant a significant damage of the EU's credibility in front of the Member States and other partners. This creates the context for understanding the EU's reaction after 2001. The Second Intifada was followed by a set of events like death of Yasser Arafat in 2004 and Israel's unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in 2005 which strongly influenced the relation between Israel and the EU leading it to the lowest level it ever had (Miller 2006). In this context, the EU became the most supportive international ally of the PA, while launching continuous criticism to Israel. Additionally, "while the EU continued to pump funds into the PA, there was a sure in support within the Community for trade sanction and academic and scientific boycotts against Israel [...]. Indeed, between November 2000 and December 2002, the EU granted nearly €250 million (US \$280 million) to the PA" (Miller 2006). However, the economic support of the EU for Israel continued too, as the EU was unwilling to apply conditionality on Israel. Besides this, "the EU kept on turning a blind eye to Israel's violations of human rights and international law [...] in the belief that positive incentives were more likely to induce a co-operative behavior on Israel's side" (Voltolini 2015).

The inclusion of Israel in trade frameworks like the Barcelona Declaration (1995), or the signing of EU-Israel Association Agreement in 1995 (entered force in June 2000) paved the road for a fruitful cooperation between the two actors in the economic field. Additionally, Israel became part of different EU schemes of financial aid through grants in different areas like the pharmaceutical industry (the Agreement on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance on Industrial Products – ACAA), aviation (the Euro-Mediterranean Aviation Agreement) or the more recent EU Trade Policy Review. As the research points out to, despite the very good economic relations between the two actors, the political relations degraded especially in the context of the Second Intifada. The events that followed the Second Intifada, especially the

World Conference Against Racism in Durban in 2001 led to a new context of approach towards Israel, a context in which the NGOs and different other interest groups began to have an increasing influence.

This thesis approaches the topic of Israeli lobby in the EU as part of the overall activity of the complex network of NGOs that are involved in either supporting or challenging different political or economic initiatives within the EU in relation to Israel. The key element shaping these activities is represented by the relation between the EU set of values lying at its very core and the issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In this regard, the research focuses in the first chapter on the idea of European foreign policy. Additionally, the introduction brings into discussion the role of the non-state actors (NSA) in shaping the EU foreign policy towards Israel. The framework used in order to properly analyse and understand this connection is provided through the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the Lisbon Treaty. One relevant aspect in relation to the European foreign policy is represented by the dichotomy that characterises it. On the one hand, the European foreign policy represents a debateable subject in relation to what is defined as being the national interest of the EU member states and the European interests.

The neo-functional approach introduces the element of spill overs, which according to those who propose this approach succeed in making the national and the supranational interests to work together. This, in essence, involves the idea that the national governments only allow spill overs of legitimacy only if this is perceived as necessary towards the realisation of their objectives. Thus, it has to be mentioned that the spill overs have two levels on which they manifest: the first one is represented by the expansion of cooperation into another related area which is the spill over in scope, while the second one is represented by the strengthening of the commitment in the initial area. A second dichotomy that characterises the European foreign policy takes into consideration the concept of normative Europe and the global ambitions of the EU. Essentially, these two elements contribute to generating of the most significant dilemmas within the EU's approach towards its objectives.

This dilemma of the EU in relation to its approach towards the foreign policy objectives is connected also to the manner in which the EU decides to project its foreign policy identity. Thus, the research discusses the existence of an assault on the European values from different illiberal regimes that otherwise provided economic growth and efficiently managed the issue of poverty, thus suggesting that the EU should involve more in realpolitik. Further, the research focuses on the evolution of the idea of European foreign policy. From an institutionalist point of view, the European foreign policy is viewed as being the same thing with the EU foreign

policy since the Maastricht Treaty. According to this view, the EU foreign policy is, basically, “the process of foreign policy coordination known as European political cooperation which began in the 1970’s and was upgraded by the Maastricht Treaty into a Common Foreign and Security Policy in 1993 and subsequently amended by the Amsterdam and Nice Treaties” (White 2004).

In order to have a clearer understanding of the elements determining the EU’s decision-making process in the field of foreign policy, it is of major importance to have a grasp of the EU’s identity. Although a relevant economic actor from the foundation of the European Community (EC) in 1952, the organization was permanently involved in an effort of molding its political identity in relation to its members and to third countries. This process was and remains a complex one as it involves a diverse set of roles. In their research, (Bretherton et al. 2006) bring into discussion some of these roles which distinctly shape the EU’s identity in the field of foreign policy: “Treatments which construct the Union’s identity and roles as primarily or exclusively a function of its singular character are not new. While varying considerably in many respects, they are united in emphasizing those aspects of the Union’s character which differentiate it from a conventional state”.

In relation to the EU’s foreign policy identity, one very relevant and debated element in same time is the pluralist approach of the European Union. The debate mainly focuses on the capacity of the EU to put together its multilateral interests with those of the Member States. This is essentially necessary for the EU’s efforts of integration in the area of foreign policy. This challenge developed in a context in which “both the terms ‘EU’ and ‘Europe’, therefore, can be regarded as poorly defined as super-ordinate categories having various and rarely challenged meanings” (Carta et al. 2015). Although it is almost always challenged by academics and politicians, pluralism remains the most significant trait of the EU identity in the area of foreign policy. In connection to this, another very important element is determining what are the costs to maintain this pluralism and whether the sides involved pay an equitable price. One approach over what the pluralism in the field of EU foreign affairs might mean is the one proposed by (Hill 2003): “If foreign policy is essentially the political strategy conducted by independent units in relation to each other, indeed, then this could only happen with the *de facto* disappearance of independent units”.

Besides a certain laxity of the literature on EU foreign policy identity in discussing the relation between identity self-perception of the Europeans and the EU foreign policy, (Lucarelli 2008) suggests that “the EU’s peculiarity in world politics derives precisely from a European interpretation of some widely shared values and principles”. While some might argue that the

values that the EU aims at promoting externally, this approach supports the idea that the EU identity in foreign policy has a dynamic character and “policy is not only an intervening variable in the process of identity-building, but also a framework in which identities are observable”. Thus, policy as an outcome of the EU institutions – especially the specific participation of the Member States in the European Council – provides the framework through which the EU identity can be observed and understood. In this context, values should not be regarded as an obstacle for the permanent development of the EU identity, but rather as elements around which the policy making process gravitates. Thus, they provide the road signs guiding the policy making process that help the EU navigate on the paths of “normative pragmatism” (Pishchikova et al. 2017).

The EU’s identity remains an element that is difficult to grasp given the discrepancies between its values and its action. As this sub-chapter will further discuss the gaps that are presented in the related literature, it is necessary to mention the claim of (Bretherton et al. 2006) that ‘the Union’s identity as a singular actor depends, not upon the values it seeks to promote (as ‘normative power’ constructions would imply), but upon the means used to pursue its objectives’. Naturally, an endeavor to fathom the gap between the EU’s normative ambitions and its practices, and the reasons that lie behind this gap is essential for various reasons. The first such reason is related to the discrepancies among different relations between the EU and third countries. In the particular case of the relations between the EU and Israel, understanding the gap between the economic and political dimensions of these relations in the post-Oslo context is of major relevance for the research.

The idea of an existing double gap between the declaratory diplomacy of the EU and its actions as well as the lack of conditionality is supported also by (Bicchi et al 2017): “We might even see a *double gap* between the EU’s normative discourse about human rights and their natural promotion, on the one hand, and between the normative discourse and economic practices more generally, on the other”.

Another significant example of a consequence following the EU not conditioning Israel in a more consistent manner is represented by the relations between Israel and the EU during Trump administration. In spite of the very good economic relations during the 4 years of Trump’s term, the political relations significantly deteriorated due to a set of foreign policy initiatives of the United States in relation to Israel. Probably the most significant one was the recognition by the United States of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. The very significance of this recognition lies in the polarization that it created among different EU member states. According to (Hamid, 2017) the announcement of Jerusalem’s recognition as the capital of

Israel by the United States came at “an important and peculiar time, when Arab regimes – particularly Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt – find themselves more aligned than ever with Israel on regional priorities.”

By approaching the evolution of Trump administration’s initiatives in relation to Israel based on this narrative, it is easier to understand the logic behind US’ withdrawal from the Iran deal, and the existence of Abraham Accords. However, as it was expected, the former EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini categorically rejected the initiative, although countries like Romania, Hungary, and Czechia initially manifested positively in respect to moving their embassies from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

This example also provides for the way in which certain Member States can react to a political decision of a third country, as well as to the reaction of the EU to certain political events. The existence of such gaps becomes, thus, another obstacle in identifying a clear political identity of the EU in the field of foreign relations. However, in relation to the existence of these gaps, this research subscribes to the idea that they have a dynamic character. Although counterintuitive in relation to other approaches in the literature on this topic which “tends not only to identify a gap, but also to reify it as a permanent feature of EU foreign policy towards the area” (Bicchi et al. 2017). This dynamic dimension of the gaps is mainly related to dynamic of the relations between the EU and Israel, and ultimately to the elements influencing the directions of this relation. More relevant for our research, the Israel-Arab conflict is a topic which is very much connected to the conceptual gap between the EU’s discourse and actions. The discussion around the Green Line, for instance, and how the EU decided to approach it in the past is considered to manifest a strong such gap since the EU conceptually and discursively justified “the need for a border and identifying it in the Green Line”, aimed at implementing it “in economic agreements and related practices”, and “endowed the Green Line with partial legal meaning in a string of legal and administrative acts issued since 2012” (Bicchi et al. 2017)

A significant element contributing to the identity of the EU in the field of foreign policy is represented by the framework provided by the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). Moreover, the ENP does not only contribute to shaping the EU’s political identity, but it also is an extended arm of the European influence. The framework proposed by the policy since the moment of its launch in 2004 aims at fostering “stability, security and prosperity in the EU’s neighborhood” (EEAS 2021 a). The policy was launched in a moment when “the UK in particular pushed for a substantive *wider Europe* initiative, to be aimed at Belarus, Moldova, Russian and Ukraine, but not the south-east European countries” (Smith 2005). In this framework “Although there was no promise of accession, the idea was that the new neighbours

would eventually evolve into states ‘sharing everything but the institutions’ with the EU”. (Pishchikova et al. 2017). The idea of Israel’s non-accession is supported by (Pardo 2010): “Israel is not regarded by EU institutions and officials as a likely candidate for joining the Union in the foreseeable future”.

The essential purpose of the ENP is, thus, to act as an additional tool to the European integration in the geographical areas in which the integration can’t be approached yet. This action is built upon to secondary objectives for the EU. The first one is to have the EU acting “as an instrument through which the Union can seek to enhance stability in its immediate neighbourhood”, while the second one is to have the enlargement process acting “as a conduit through which the EU as a normative power Europe can project its norms and values in a way that is both efficient and legitimate” (Haukkala 2008). The relevance of approaching the ENP lies in the fact that the relation between the EU and Israel is shaped by the ENP policy framework. While positioning the countries included in the ENP in a gray zone in relation to their European integration, this acts as an obstacle for the EU’s efficiency in its normative endeavors. This comes as catch, as (Haukkala 2008) describes it since while “the EU might have [...] the power to set the parameters of normality and it might have some means of projecting its vision internationally but the limits of the Union’s influence are conditioned by the need for this exercise to be seen as legitimate”. The context created by this obstacle puts the EU in a position to be able to legitimately project its normative influence only by having offering a state full membership. This obstacle can be easily observed especially in the relations between the EU and Turkey or Israel.

However, the situation is even more complex since the ENP regulates the EU’s relations with both Israel and Palestine. The challenge that this situation poses is mainly related to the ENP’s ambitions as ‘force for good’ in the world. Related to the Israel-Palestine conflict, the first significant challenge for the ENP was represented by the victory of Hamas in the 2006 elections. The challenge was represented by the EU’s “failure to find a convincing compromise between ‘values’ and ‘utility’ that will satisfy both insiders and outsiders in respect of the Hamas electoral victory”, which “has compromised the EU’s status as an ethical actor in the region” (Barbé et al. 2008). Among other topics related to the EU’s relations with Israel and Palestine, without a doubt the Israel-Palestine conflict represents the center of gravity. The EU’s involvement with conflicts in its neighborhood has three dimensions: “conflict prevention, which aims at preventing violent trials of strength from breaking out; conflict management, which focuses on preventing the escalation of a conflict once it has broken out; and conflict resolution, which is concerned with re-establishing a broad-based and functioning peace”

(Bicchi et al. 2015). Other than the Israel-Palestine conflict, the topics around which the relation between the EU and Israel gravitates are the withdrawal of Israel from the Occupied Territories with minor modifications mutually agreed, the accelerated expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank including East Jerusalem, the status of Jerusalem as the capital of the future two states, the work of support for Palestinian refugees, and the acts of violence of Israel against Palestinians (EEAS 2021 b).

Although the Treaty of Rome did not make a specific reference to foreign policy issues, the need for European Community external relations was acknowledged and the Treaty of Rome “empowered the European Community to enter into association agreements with third parties” (Bretherton et al. 2006), which essentially put the Community in the position of acting on the international scene. The 1973’s Luxembourg Report represented an innovative document, clearly approaching the issue of a common foreign policy. The Report eliminated any fear regarding the fact that a European foreign policy initiative would deprive the Member States of their national sovereignty. The framework proposed by the Luxembourg Report proposed that “all decision-making powers were invested in the foreign ministers, who were also to act as the main public representatives of the European Union in international affairs through the rotating presidency” (Øhrgaard 2004). The Luxembourg Report was soon followed by the Copenhagen report (1973), bringing into discussion topics like the cooperation with the then Conference of Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), “following and studying problems’ in respect to the Middle East, the Mediterranean area and Asia, and consultations to take place ‘between the Presidency and the Embassies of Member States on the situation in the Indian sub-continent and in the Middle East” (Copenhagen Report 1973).

A major impact on the European foreign policy had the Lisbon Treaty. As the years before it were considered a failure in relation to the institutional development of the EU, the Lisbon Treaty is regarded as an innovative treaty that eliminated the pillar structure of the Maastricht Treaty. Moreover, the European Parliament received new powers and the European Council became an institution of its own right. In the field of foreign policy, the Lisbon Treaty included two innovations: the establishing of the position of a President of the European Council and a High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. These developments generated by the Lisbon Treaty are a very relevant factor for this research since they involve other actors that have the capacity to influence the direction of the European foreign policy. In the same time, these developments indicate the clear objective of the European Union to become a stronger and more relevant actor in the international scene.

The changes brought the 2009 Lisbon Treaty in the field of EU's foreign affairs changed also the approach of the EU to Israel. Reaching a solution or a compromise represented a real conundrum for the Member States before the Lisbon Treaty. Specifically, the EU had "to reach compromise between member states with strong ties to Israel – such as Germany, the Netherlands, [...] and countries that have traditionally held positions close to Arab views, including France, Greece, Spain or Malta" (Müller 2017). However, the entire context was changed by the Lisbon Treaty which brought a different dynamic between the EU countries in the specific area of foreign affairs by creating the EEAS and the position of High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP). One of the main consequences was a higher level of supra-nationalisation of the foreign policy. Although criticised by the supporters of a stronger national contribution to the European foreign policy, the supra-nationalisation facilitates 'strategic continuity of the EU's policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict' as well as it is involved in "linking-up the CFSP and other aspects of the EU's external relations, particularly with respect to the ENP" and managing the funding which is mostly relevant for the implementation of the ENP (Müller 2017).

As the research indicated so far, the relation between the EU and Israel, as it is the case with other countries that are included in the ENP, manifests a visible gap between its rhetoric and its actions. The topic of human rights in Israel remains still a sensitive one, especially after the controversial 2018 Basic Law. This aspect puts the EU in a conundrum in which its very "raison d'être" on the international scene – the human rights and the rule of law (Tocci 2009) - are seriously challenged. A mismanagement of this context might lead to serious implications for the role played by the EU in relation to Israel and to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Also, this maintains the schizophrenic relation in which the EU and Israel maintain very good economic relations in contrast to the low political ones.

This contrast remains one of the paradoxes present in the political identity of the EU, and it shapes also the image of the EU in the world thus having the potential to sabotage its global ambitions. In the EU's relation to Israel, this might also significantly contribute to a reality that is more and more real in a post-Trump context: a One-State solution. The signs indicating this reality are related to a diverse set of global and regional elements like: the policies of Trump administration in regard to Israel, the alienation of the EU in its involvement in the Middle East, the feeling of insecurity in the region emanating from Tehran, and aspects related to internal politics in Israel. Moreover, the Palestinian Authority (PA) is in a deep crisis and is not perceived anymore as reliable partner of dialogue neither by the US, nor by the Israel. Among the elements that led to the current situation of the PA it has to be mentioned that the

organization is “at odds with a right-wing Netanyahu government that shows little interest in meeting even baseline Palestinian demands; is facing bankruptcy; is mired in a dysfunctional intra-Palestinian standoff between mainstream factions and the Islamist group Hamas in Gaza; and has become increasingly unpopular among ordinary Palestinians, the majority of whom now see the PA as a liability, not an asset” (Tharoor 2020)

From a theoretical point of view, the research is built by using a social constructivist approach. The main reason for using this approach is represented by the that it allows a clear analysis of the interaction of the NSAs involved in shaping the relations between the EU and Israel. A crucial element supporting this framework is represented by the discourse analysis in respect to the narratives involved. Discourse, in general, is relevant for a research due to a very significant reason: it clarifies the self-perception of a certain actor. By having a clear description of the way in which a certain actor perceives itself, it makes it possible to understand the dynamics behind the policies and the actions of that actor. As our analysis focuses, firstly on the analysis of the EU foreign policy, and secondly on the impact of the Israeli lobby in the EU, there are two aspects to be clarified. The first one is that it is necessary to demonstrate “the foreign policy analysis can be adapted to its traditional state-centric focus” (White 2004), while the second one is that it is necessary to “establish the alternative focus of the analysis, as the EU’s global role will be analysed in foreign policy terms by reference to the controversial idea of European foreign policy“ (White 2004). In relation to the relation between the EU and Israeli lobby, it is important to understand the concern of (White 2004) that “to conceive of the EU as an actor, a ‘presence’ or an ‘international identity’ - in short to adopt a holistic approach to analysis which focuses on ‘singleness’ or ‘unitariness’” is to ignore the “multiple realities” (Jørgensen 1998) of the European foreign policy, and politics in general. In this context, the presence and influence of both state and non-state actors is to be acknowledged and researched as such.

The analysis of the European foreign policy can be viewed as a latecomer in the theoretical environment created by the multitude of theories trying to analyze foreign policy. This aspect is supported by two facts: first one is that the very idea of European countries coming together for the common prosperity is new. Secondly, the existence of an integrated European foreign policy, as contested as it is, enters the scene much later in the history of the European Union. In any case, these two elements become possible subjects for analysis much later after the foreign policy analysis began changing its approach from a state-centered one to an actor-centered one. Strongly related to this aspect, as well as to the European foreign policy, it has to be mentioned that “what is important in the context of establishing the parameters of a

European system of foreign policy, however, is the extent to which the foreign policies of member states have been transformed by the process of operating within the EU institutional context” (White 2004). In this respect, an accurate description of this new context is the one given by (Hill et al. 1996): “habits of cooperation, accepted advantages of shared information, responses to common threats, cost saving through increased collaboration, have all significantly altered patterns of national policy making”. This brings us to the conclusion that what can be called today as the European foreign policy is rather the result of a slow process – that periodically required new regulatory frameworks within the EU Treaties – than the result of any EU Treaty.

Regarding the methodology, it has to be mentioned that The analysis to be made in this research is built on four crucial elements. The first one is to clarify what exactly it means for the European Union to be an international actor and how the European Union perceives itself, and is perceived, in terms of power. In this regard, EU’s “self-image as a ‘civilian power’ will, however, be hard to sustain as the EU moves to acquire what the Cologne Council defined as ‘the capability for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them, and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crises without prejudice to actions by NATO. The policy implications of this shift in role perceptions of the EU by Russia or countries in the Middle East and the Maghreb may be quite profound, especially as regards attitudes towards EU enlargement or the role of the Union in the Arab-Israeli peace process” (Price 2004).

The next step is to identify the proper theoretical approach as it is necessary for it to be able to comprehend the multitude of aspects shaping the European foreign policy, like relevant actors, interests, institutions, practices etc.

The third element is represented by the analysis of the EU’s discourse as part of the European foreign policy. In relation to the analysis of foreign policy, “discourse analysis has been used not only as a critical theory; it has also been used in order to explain, or at least in order to better understand, how certain foreign policies have come about. The aims of critique and explanation do not need to be mutually exclusive, and in fact critical discourse analysts have implicitly or explicitly included an explanatory element in their analysis” (Diez 2014).

The fourth element to lie at the foundation of this analysis is connected to the idea of European foreign policy and what it represents. Regarding this, it has to be taken into consideration the fact that the “European foreign policy is not simply a convenient shorthand for the collective foreign policies of member states. Nor it is simply “EU foreign policy”, which appears to be the preferred label of most commentators. The study establishes that there are

different types of foreign policy systems in the European Union and that these different types increasingly overlap” (White 2004). In connection to this, the role of the non-state actors can be also comprehended since “non-EU states, non-European states like the US, other non-EU organizations (governmental and non-governmental) all overlap the EU’s areas of activity” (White 2004).

The neo-realist approach of (Mearsheimer et al. 2007) on analyzing the US foreign policy and the influence of Israeli lobby on it can be seen as an exception in the context of delimiting the theoretical approach. There are multiple reasons building around the exceptional character of the so controversial analysis. The first reason is that “the classical, or Realist approach is state-centric, leading to a focus on the international political system. Other actors, such as intergovernmental organizations and transnational business corporations, may be admitted but their functions are seen as essentially subordinate to those of states” (Bretherton et al 2006). As the European foreign policy is a key element in this research, it has to be mentioned that the neo-realist approach focuses on the state as the main actor in the international system, while as it is the case with the European Union foreign policy, “the individual foreign policies of members states remain very important, possibly still more important than either Community or Union foreign policies in terms of their overall impact on world politics” (White 2004).

The activity of interest groups within the EU in general have to be regarded as being part of much larger context. This context is mainly related to the more and more important roles played by the NSAs in shaping the policymaking process. This role is mainly attached to the dynamic behind the transformation of diplomacy from the exclusivist club diplomacy to a much larger scene, or the network diplomacy. Nevertheless, this transformation should not be regarded as a challenge to state-based diplomacy while “the incorporation of private or non-state-based actors on a geographical or functional basis reinforces the subordinate status of these groups” (Cooper 2013). Moreover, “their inclusion is done very much according to the rules of the game set by the Westphalian system” (Cooper 2013).

Relations between the EU and Israel, as well as the evolution and the potential directions that they might take are subject to a complex set of elements that contribute to their evolution. As these elements’ contribution are different, it is of significant importance for the research to understand the role played by the Israeli lobby in potentially influencing these contributions. Nevertheless, the role played by the lobby is on the scene of current political situation in the EU. The main elements that significantly influence these relations are the Israel-Palestine conflict, the economic relations between EU and Israel, the changes in approach towards Israel

brought by the president of the United States, Donald Trump, the growing antisemitism in Europe (in tight, but exclusive connection to the rise of European populism), as well as – and not less important – the way in which the European Union chooses to build its identity in the pursue for “a stronger Europe in the world”. One very important aspect to be mentioned is that these elements often manifest a strong contradiction that, as we will see, create uncertainty in respect to EU’s members position towards Israel. Based on (Aggestam 2004) ‘the stability of the EU as a foreign policy actor ... is dependent on the member states modifying their behavior according to each others’ roles and expectation.’. Moreover, according to (March et al. 1998) ‘political actors are constituted by a subtle interplay between interests, by which they evaluate their expected consequences and rules embedded in their identities and political institutions. EU-Israel relations, and especially the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, are of major importance for the European Union as ‘they erode the transatlantic relationship, reveal sharply different policy opinions among EU capitals, bring war and unrest to the vicinity of the EU, and test the limits of EU foreign policy instruments and principles’ (Martins 2016).

The general overview of the EU’s relations with Israel has a significant importance for a few reasons. As the main focus of this research is on the relations between the EU and Israel, the first reason is that the bilateral relations of these actors have a distinct set of particularities due the elements involved: the EU’s political identity, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, ideological particularities (especially on Israel’s side), and the strong political dimension of the economic bilateral relations. Secondly, in spite of their distinctiveness, the relations between the two actors are a relevant element in the whole mechanism of EUs relations with third countries, especially countries that are in its geographical neighborhood. Thus, one can better understand the practices and the instruments that the EU uses in building and projecting its political identity towards third countries. Thirdly, in spite of its policies inspired by its immediate needs related to security (real or perceived) and often opposed approaches towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Israel remains connected to the EU culturally, politically and economically.

Although the literature in the field tried to attach different political identities to the EU, the development of the EU-Israel relation indicates a prevailing normative dimension of the EU’s political identity in the field of foreign policy. As this research pointed out in this chapter, the developments in the relations between Israel and the EU after the Oslo Accords represent a clear example of EU’s normative approach. Although some researchers might argue that the use of sticks and carrots by the EU in the shape of conditionality could have been applied more, this research supports the opinion that even the conditionality applied in the context created by

the Cast Lead operation is enough in order to identify a visible normative dimension of the bilateral relation.

Although the Oslo Accords is regard as an element that brought only a temporary improvement of the relations between the EU and Israel, it also can be claimed that it significantly increased the leverage of the EU as a mediator in the Israeli-Palestine conflict. The main element that contributed to this was one that was neglected so far by the literature in the field and that is the EU's consistent position on the Occupied Territories and the overall post 1967 political situation in Israel. This recommended the EU as a *honest broker*, consistent with its values and policies.

The EU's leverage can be perceived even in the post Second Intifada context, when the relations between the two actors reached a very low level. Moreover, the Lisbon Treaty had a major contribution in re-framing not only the EU's relations with Israel, but EU's approach towards its entire neighborhood. Although disputed in many regards, the ENP represents one of the most successful initiatives of the post-Lisbon EU. In this context, the EU created the necessary framework for being able to maintain its position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict while also entertaining a privileged relationship with Israel. The 2013 Guidelines, the bilateral agreement on further liberalization of trade in agriculture and fisheries, and the Agreement on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance of Industry Products (ACAA) are proofs for this new context.

The EU is often criticized for being complacent with the gap between its rhetoric and its actions in the case of Israel, especially for not imposing more conditionality on Israel in different contexts. Critics related to this particular aspect remain however debatable for one particular reason: the EU's building and projection of its political identity in the field of foreign policy remains in many regards strongly connected to the Member State. However, this aspect changed as the Lisbon Treaty gave the European Council and the EEAS more leverage in the foreign policy decision-making and implementation.

The 4year term of the US president Donald Trump represented a major game changer in the evolution of the Israeli Palestinian peace process, and for the EU's relations with Israel. The initiatives that the US launched in relation to Israel – especially the rejection of Iran Nuclear Deal – created an environment in which the EU was alienated and disregarded as a mediator and partner in any potential effort related to the peace process. The symbolical recognition by the US of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel brought raised the issue whether the Two-State solution is still on the table, and if the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is still of interest for the international community. In this context, the presence of the unstable Iran in the region seems

to overshadow the importance of solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Also, this can represent an excellent opportunity for the EU to intermediate the return of the US in the Iran Nuclear Deal. This step would increase the trust of Gulf countries in Iran which would eventually allow a re-focus of the international community on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The third chapter of the research has presented the evolution of the EU's institutional framework as well as the key features that allowed lobby activity to develop. Thus, it can be said that a major role in the evolution of lobby activities in the EU, besides the whole institutional machinery, was played by the European pluralistic culture. This environment provided the necessary background for the development of the EU's institutional mechanism through the Treaties. In spite of many critics that the EU had in relation to its levels of transparency, the efforts that were made to increase the access of civil society and the public were consistent.

Transparency remains in many regards an important element for the fundamental objective of lobbies: a higher influence. While the EU's treaties contributed to the improvement of the EU's decision-making process in relation to its needs, relations with the European society and civil society manifested itself as a perennial need in more and more open society. Moreover, these changes were part of the EU's actions in relation to its identity.

During a span of almost 30 years since the Maastricht Treaty, the EU succeeded in developing an institutional system that allows the existence of a complex exchange between the Commission, the EP and the Council. Thus, this leads to a win-win context in which the EU institutions involved receive expertise from lobbies, while the lobbies have a chance to exercise their influence. As the research pointed out, the levels on which the lobby can take place can be either national or EU-level. This aspect creates an even more complex environment for the lobbies since they are in a permanent process of adopting and adapting their strategies in order to obtain the best results. Choosing the right strategy is strongly connected to the objective itself. In many regards, the objective determines the strategy and levels of lobby: national vs. EU-level, private vs. public, formal vs. informal. To this, other elements like the organisational culture of the lobby or the client are involved, as well as other concurrent lobbies, various political aspects etc. In this context, it can be said that the evolution of lobby in Europe was connected to two types of adaptation: a short-term one, related to episodic changes in politics and legislation, and a long term, much deeper one, in relation to the development of the EU based on the changes brought by treaties.

Although focused more on the issue of further integration in a post-Cold-War Europe, the Treaties brought structural changes in the EU decision-making process, leading in the end

to an institutional environment in which the contribution of civil society plays a significant role. Far from being the perfect system, the EU succeeds in bringing at the same table a diverse spectrum of opinions on various issues: experts, practitioners, legislators, associations, and NGOs. Moreover, by having three institutions mainly involved in analysing and amending different legislative proposals in collaboration with various lobbies strongly hints at the EU's pluralistic approach.

These regulatory and institutional frameworks have a strong influence over the way in which the exchange between the sides involved takes place. The channels of conveying the messages are under the strong influence of both formal and informal rules that aim at ensuring a responsible and transparent process. As it was indicated in the chapter, the issue of transparency was not relevant only for the EU institutions, but also for lobbyists for various reasons among which the credibility in relation to external actors, and legitimacy in internal affairs represent the best gains for a lobby on long-term. However, the activity of a lobby is not an easy one especially due to the fact that it has to permanently maintain its access to EU institutions through a consistent set of *access goods*. These goods include complex efforts of the lobby in order to provide a good knowledge to the Commission's expert gatekeepers, and further in the process to the EP.

The EU's efforts to provide the highest level possible of transparency represent a clear testimony of the instrumental importance that transparency has in general for the decision-making process. The creation of a transparency register represented a clear signal from the EU's side that the lobbyists find themselves in a stick and carrots system in which playing by the formal and informal rules is generally recognised as bringing mutual benefits for those involved. Regarding the concept of deliberative lobby, as mentioned in this chapter, identifying up to which extent a certain initiative meets the criteria is also important. However, in the context in which the lobby is a two-ways exchange, there is one dilemma regarding up to which extent such an initiative has the right to be supported instead of another initiative which is, at a level of perception or in reality, less ethical. More specifically, in shaping the relation between a lobby and policymakers can the ethical dimension of a lobby outshine the objective of another lobby?

To conclude, it has to be mentioned this chapter described the importance of the institutional environment in the evolution of European lobby in general. On the one hand, formal elements like the EU treaties as well as different EU-level and national legislations provided a solid foundation for the lobby itself based on EU values like freedom of expression, pluralism, democracy. On the other hands, elements like the culture of European lobby,

European values, and different informal protocols during the interaction seem to have had created a complex symbiosis with the regulatory framework in which the lobby developed. Although subject to improvement, the result is so far a solid multifaceted network of cooperation able to engage a big number of actors in exchanging different types of private and public information, thus contributing to an improved European democracy.

The contribution of the 4th chapter of this thesis to the overall research is related to providing a clear understanding of the EU's normative identity in the area of foreign policy, and more specifically in the EU's relations with Israel. In this context, the research identifies the EU's actions in the field of foreign policy as playing a crucial role not only in the manner in which the EU projects its political identity to its outside partners, but also for the development of the identity itself. By taking into consideration the two facets of the EU's normative identity which are, firstly, the internal one focusing on the ideational purposes of the EU, and the external one aiming to design the external relations between the EU and other actors, the research succeeds in identifying the paradigm of EU's actions in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. By discussing these elements, this final chapter provides a description of the elements influencing the EU's involvement in external relations, and specifically in relation to Israel. Pointing out to the EU's legitimacy as a crucial element in further developments of the EU's identity, the chapter takes into consideration the importance of compatibility between the EU's projected identity and the reality on the field.

The lobby efforts of both Israelis and Palestinians surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict mirror, on the one hand, the desire of the parts involved in the conflict to strengthen their credibility in front of the EU in relation to the conflict, thus pointing out to the extent of the expectations they have from the EU as a potential mediator. On the other hand, the major interest that the EU has in identifying a path towards the Two-State solution. It is relevant to mention that the topic of Israeli lobby is often perceived negatively, especially due to its allegedly high influence over the EU foreign policy in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. An important role in shaping this perception of the Israeli role was played by the research of Mearsheimer and Waltz. According to them, the US' support for Israel is a disproportionate one from a strategic point of view in relation to other of its foreign policy objectives:

“Although there are compelling reasons for the United States to support Israel's existence and to remain committed to its survival, the current level of U.S. support and its largely unconditional nature cannot be justified on strategic grounds” (Mearsheimer et al 2007).

However, this aspect is contradicted by Musu, who identifies a larger spectrum of elements that contribute to justifying the US' support for Israel. According to him, the presence

of lobby is just one of these elements, together with a sympathy for the Jewish community in relation to the Holocaust, common interests in regional peace, the high potential of Israel as a strategic regional partner for the US, as well as “the possibility of US-Israel military collaboration, through enhanced cooperation on counterterrorism, various forms of defense against ballistic missiles, American use of Israeli air space of collaboration between intelligence agencies” (Musu 2010).

The issue of Israeli-Palestinian conflict is relevant not only from the perspective of foreign policy, but also in relation to the domestic politics within the EU. This leads us to think that the bi-dimensional characteristic of the lobby in the EU in relation to the Israeli Palestinian conflict is not related only to the foreign relations/domestic political affairs binomial relationship, but also to the foreign relations/inter-European relations. In this context, it is possible to speculate over a secondary agenda of the interest groups to influence the relations between different EU states. Thus, while the domestic political affairs influence the different political factions with the EU, especially in the left/right spectrum, the inter-European relations are related to potential divisions between European states in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It has to be mentioned that while in some cases the root is ideological, this is not always the case. In some cases, the main reason for internal divisions are the specific relations between certain EU states and the State of Israel combined or separated from their approach towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For instance, the relations between certain Central-Eastern European members and Israel during the past 10 years were different than those between certain Western Members and Israel, although the unequivocal support for the Two-State solution is present in the discourse of all the EU member states. Another particular aspect contributing to the division between the EU states related to their relations with Israel is represented by their relations with the US, and the foreign policy of the US in relation to Israel at a certain moment.

The case of EU's relations with Israel in the post-Oslo context plays a significant role in understanding the EU's efforts in developing a relationship with Israel that aims at providing a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As the Oslo Accords were promising a positive direction in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the new context opened also a new cycle of contacts between the EU and Israel. However, as new violent developments occurred between Israel and Palestine, improvements in the relations between the two actors were seriously challenged. A set of initiatives like the EU-Israel Association Agreement, or the ACAA became seriously challenged by the civil society. Following the Second Intifada and the 2001 World Conference against Racism in Durban, the political scene surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the EU's involvement in the issue changed significantly. As the chapter

pointed out to, a major role in this change was played by different NGOs/interest groups that either went against or supported these initiatives. While not ignoring some aspects related to the technicalities of the interactions between these interest groups and different EU states or institutions, the chapter focuses more on the objectives and the channels that these interest groups targeted in their lobby efforts. By doing so, the research succeeds in describing the role played by these organisations and to clarify the overall impact that they had. As an observation, it has to be mentioned that the frameworks that these interest groups used in order to convey their messages had a significant contribution not only on the initiatives themselves, but also on the manner in which the EU projects its normative political identity in relation to other actors.

The chapter brought also into discussion the issue of anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism in Europe. By discussing the issue of European antisemitism and the left-wing anti-Zionist ideas, the research aimed at identifying the common narratives between the European left-wing antisemitism and some of the narratives that certain NGOs involved in lobbying pro-Palestine causes have. While not identifying some specific narratives that occur constantly in the narratives of some of these NGOs, often some of these NGOs find themselves, either willingly or unwillingly, in contexts in which they act as transmission belts for some of these extreme interpretations of different aspects related to either the implementation of human IHL or IHRL, or to the existence of the State of Israel in general. Moreover, identifying whether these narratives reflect a certain direction of action contributes to identify the line to be drawn in order to understand whether the accusation of antisemitism for some of these NGOs' actions is suitable. In this context, the chapter clarifies the difference between a genuine critical attitude towards Israel and an anti-Zionist anti-Semitic attitude. The chapter also points out to the current environment in which the left-wing antisemitism developed and its connection to Muslim antisemitism. Following the 2001 World Conference against Racism and the formation of the BDS movement, a strong connection between the left-wing antisemitism and Islamic fundamentalism became more visible. In consequence, it led to the creation of an environment within the pro-Palestine NGOs in Europe and not only that can be partially described as biased against the State of Israel. Also, it has to be mentioned that this bias is, according to this research, based rather on convenience than on the principle. This is, mainly, the case with the NGOs involved with the BDS movement. Also, since the chapter approached also the topic of frames and the fact that many of these NGOs, either pro or against Israel, build their initiatives so that they can influence policymakers. Thus, from a certain point of view, the BDS movement itself can be regarded as channel through which certain messages are conveyed. From a strictly

technical point of view, the BDS movement mostly fits the description of an open lobby initiative, aiming at using the sentiments of the public in order to pressure the policymakers.

The specific case of MATTIN represents a clear example of the role that a pro-Palestine NGO can play in influencing the development of a certain lobby initiative. MATTIN Group had a major contribution to clarifying the issue of the border between Israel and the OT in technical legislative terms. Although the initiative can easily be perceived as essentially having an anti-Israel objective due to its connection to the 2013 Guidelines and the establishing of the ROO, the final result of the initiative represents a successful example of diffusion for the EU normative values. Similarly to the EJC and the EMHRN in the case of Goldstone Report, MATTIN Group succeeded in creating a frame that was compatible with the NPE, thus easing the access of its lobby initiative to the policymakers. However, although the framework was an extensively political one, the approach was different. Thus, while MATTIN Group preferred to focus on a more closed approach, thus keeping the developments far from the public and media, EJC and EMHRN had a mixed approach, thus employing open channels – media, academics etc. – and closed channels like informal contacts with MEPs or official contacts that, however, were not promoted publicly.

This chapter focuses more on the concept of framing and, consequently, the frames that were used by some NGOs in order to convey their message, rather than on the technicalities of the contacts between lobbyists and the decision-makers. The cases presented in this chapter exemplify the most encountered types of lobbying: open/closed, based on political and/or legal frames. Moreover, the chapter approached cases in which the main actors were either singular NGOs or lobby organisations (D&D Consulting Services, EFI) or an alliance of NGOs, as it is the case of the EJC and the EMHRN. By doing so, the chapter aimed at ensuring a broader approach regarding the types of NSA involved in lobbying different institutions of the EU, as well as regarding the framing approaches. However, only focusing on the framing strategies generates a limited comprehension of a certain lobby initiatives. This aspect represents, also, one of the limitations of not only this chapter but also for the entire thesis. Due to the limited access to the informal interactions between the lobbyists and the decision makers one cannot fully grasp the full spectrum of nuances that characterize the discussions that occurred in those contexts. Although the regulation of lobby activities in the EU emphasizes more the transparency of those interactions between lobbyists and the decision makers, the occurrence of informal interactions between the parts involved thwarts a full comprehension of the exchanges that take place between them.