

International Economic Boycott of Israel? Europe Explores Sanctions Against Companies Tied to Occupation

By [Annie Robbins](#)

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Even though government minister, and [occupation denier](#), Naftali Bennett has claimed that talk of boycotts against Israel is [absurd](#), it seems other officials in Israel are in fact worried and there is growing “concern” over the possibility of an international economic boycott of Israel.

Investment committees for European banks are considering recommending their institutions bar loans to Israeli companies that have economic links with the Palestinian occupied territories. Check that wording, “economic links” — this ensnares many more businesses than those directly operating within the territories. Last week, Haaretz reporter Yossi Verter referenced this as “[the mother of all fears](#)” a “[nightmare scenario](#)” and warned of an “economic tsunami”.

Bluntly titled “[Danger ahead: an Israel boycott](#)”, today’s Haaretz editorial does not mince words:

In Friday’s Haaretz, Yossi Verter reported that the relevant government ministries had recently received disturbing news. Major banks in Europe with operations around the world have been exploring the possibility of barring loans to Israeli companies that have a business or economic link with the occupied territories. According to the information received, these banks’ investment committees have been considering recommending barring their institutions from providing loans, or any other assistance, to Israeli companies that manufacture, build or conduct commerce in the territories, or to banks that provide mortgage lending or loans to builders or buyers of housing in the territories.

Although the recommendations have been rejected for the time being – after an Israeli lobbying campaign that came against the backdrop of U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry’s diplomatic initiative in the region – the proposal will continue to hover over Israel.

The magnitude of the danger this poses to the Israeli economy is hard to overstate. A European economic boycott of those with any connection to the occupied territories would be very broad. And Livni is warning that it would spread way beyond that. Even at this point, the worldwide Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement (BDS) has chalked up a not-inconsiderable number of achievements.

As a result, Israel is facing its moment of truth. Is it prepared to pay a steep economic price for its continued occupation of the West Bank and for its

diplomatic inaction? Is it ready to pay the price of the government's refusal to work for the establishment of a Palestinian state, to which Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu committed back in 2009, with the economic implications that such a boycott entails?

And yesterday Gideon Levy endorsed the BDS campaign. From his article, "[The Israeli patriot's final refuge: boycott](#)":

We have considered the alternatives. A boycott is the least of all evils, and it could produce historic benefits. It is the least violent of the options and the one least likely to result in bloodshed. It would be painful like the others, but the others would be worse.

On the assumption that the current status quo cannot continue forever, it is the most reasonable option to convince Israel to change. Its effectiveness has already been proven. More and more Israelis have become concerned recently about the threat of the boycott. When Justice Minister Tzipi Livni warns about it spreading and calls as a result for the diplomatic deadlock to be broken, she provides proof of the need for a boycott. She and others are therefore joining the boycott, divestment and sanction movement. Welcome to the club.

The change won't come from within. That has been clear for a long time. As long as Israelis don't pay a price for the occupation, or at least don't make the connection between cause and effect, they have no incentive to bring it to an end..... As long as the arrogance and self-victimization continue among the Chosen People, the most chosen in the world, always the only victim, the world's explicit stance won't change a thing.

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Change will only come from the outside.....The distinction between products from the occupation and Israeli products is an artificial creation. It's not the settlers who are the primary culprits but rather those who cultivate their existence. All of Israel is immersed in the settlement enterprise, so all of Israel must take responsibility for it and pay the price for it. There is no one unaffected by the occupation, including those who fancy looking the other way and steering clear of it. We are all settlers.

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And it can happen here too. Israel's economy will not withstand a boycott. It is true that at the beginning it will enhance the sense of victimhood, isolationism and nationalism, but not in the long run. It could result in a major change in attitude. When the business community approaches the government, the government will listen and also perhaps act. When the damage is to every citizen's pocketbook, more Israelis will ask themselves, maybe for the first time, what it's all about and why it's happening.

It's difficult and painful, almost impossibly so, for an Israeli who has lived his whole life here, who has not boycotted it, who has never considered emigrating and feels connected to this country with all his being, to call for such a boycott. I have never done so. I have understood what motivated the boycott and was able to provide justification for such motives. But I never preached for others to take such a step. However, with Israel getting itself into another round of deep stalemate, both diplomatic and ideological, the call for a boycott is required as the last refuge of a patriot.

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Articles by: [Annie Robbins](#)

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