

Leading Israel Lobby Group Sees Massive Rise in Budget

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A leading pro-Israel group in Brussels has seen its budget increase fivefold over the past few years.

The [European Jewish Association](#) has become increasingly prominent in efforts to counter the Palestinian call for boycott, divestment and sanctions. One of its campaign [priorities](#) is to convince political parties that they should issue policy statements rejecting the BDS movement as anti-Semitic.

The association has a massive war chest.

The latest annual budget that it [declared](#) came to \$8.5 million. That is five times the \$1.7 million per year [figure](#) previously stated by the association.



I asked Menachem Margolin (image on the right), head of the European Jewish Association, to explain the increase. I asked him, too, how much his group receives from the Israeli government.

Margolin replied that “since we can’t really consider you as a great supporter” of his organization, “we won’t answer your questions and won’t provide you [with] any information” about it.

The \$8.5 million budget was declared by the association for the 2016 financial year. It has not yet entered figures for subsequent years into a register of lobbyists set up by European Union administrators.

The latest such entry made by the association cites “donations” as the source of all its funding, without giving further details. A trawl through the EU’s lobbying register indicates that the European Jewish Association is now the wealthiest pro-Israel lobby group headquartered in Brussels.

The budget increase enjoyed by the association reflects how Israel and its supporters are spending more on trying to fight BDS activists. In late 2017, it was [reported](#) that \$72 million had been earmarked for that purpose, with the funds coming both from the Israeli state and from private donors.

Double standards

The efforts to combat the BDS movement have been overseen by [Gilad Erdan](#), Israel's minister for strategic affairs. He has [warned](#) that campaigners who urge a boycott of Israel will pay an unspecified "price."

A [documentary](#) made by Al Jazeera - censored under pressure from the Israel lobby - showed how the strategic affairs ministry is gathering data on Palestine solidarity activists, with a view to taking action against them. In a recent report, the ministry [dismissed](#) as "terrorists in suits" a number of Palestinians who are outspoken in demanding justice and equality for their people.

The European Jewish Association has been in [direct contact](#) with Erdan. Photographs on its website show that the association played host to Erdan during a 2017 visit to Brussels.

Furthermore, the association has [organized](#) events jointly with the Israeli government.

Like many similar lobbyists, Menachem Margolin has displayed double standards. At the same time as accusing the BDS movement of anti-Semitism - even though it strenuously [opposes](#) racial and religious bigotry - Margolin has advocated engagement with genuine anti-Semites.

Last year, he [contended](#) that Israel should be willing to work with Europe's far-right parties if they are in government. He was effectively stating that Israel should be prepared to overlook how Austria's Freedom Party [wants](#) concentration camps for refugees or how Poland's Law and Justice has [denied](#) what really happened during the Holocaust once their top figures are being driven around in ministerial cars.

Smeared

I am among the campaigners whom Margolin has smeared.

In January, the European Jewish Association issued a [statement](#) alleging that my blog on The Electronic Intifada "glorifies" the actions of Hamas. When I challenged Margolin to produce evidence of such glorification, he said "everyone can make mistakes and get wrong information."

Despite acknowledging - at least implicitly - that he had made false claims against me, Margolin has not yet retracted his statement.

He indicated that he would only be prepared to do so if I condemned Hamas. That is an unreasonable condition.

Arguing that Palestinians have the right to resist Israel's apartheid system - as I have repeatedly - is not the same thing as glorifying the actions of a particular organization.

Margolin has [formed](#) a number of pro-Israel organizations in Brussels. Some – including [The Joseph Project](#) and the European Cultural Center – are secretive and appear to have published virtually no information about their activities. Margolin works from a building within walking distance of the main EU institutions.

The European Jewish Association is not the only pro-Israel group to see its budget rise substantially.

The AJC Transatlantic Institute – the Brussels branch of the American Jewish Committee – has almost [\\$1 million](#) per year at its disposal. That is more than three times the institute’s declared budget for 2010.

David Harris, a top figure in the American Jewish Committee, [explained](#) back in 2004 how the pro-Israel lobby was paying greater attention to the European Union as the bloc was expanding in size. “We need to be there, just as we need to be at the United Nations,” Harris said.

Israel and its supporters are evidently investing vast sums on trying to influence the EU and thwart the BDS movement. While they may have some short-term successes, they could ultimately find out that all their money has been wasted.

BDS tactics rely on people power if they are to prove successful. With public awareness about Palestine growing, there appears to be little danger that ordinary folk will suddenly fall in love with Israel, no matter how much it spends in Brussels, Geneva, New York or Washington.

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Featured image: The European Jewish Association has played host to Gilad Erdan, Israel’s minister for strategic affairs. ([European Jewish Association](#))

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