

Israel: Innovation and Development

On January 10-12, 2016, Carlos Moedas, the European Union Commissioner for Research, Science, and Innovation, visited Jerusalem and Ramallah. His visit is intended to strengthen the cooperation between the EU and local research organizations in science and technology. In Ramallah he discussed a possible research and innovation program for Palestinians. But his main conversations will be at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, the Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovot, and a number of Israeli technological enterprises.

Moedas is responsible for EU's Horizon 2020, the world's largest public research program with which Israel has been associated since June 2014. This has meant both Israeli cooperation with European researchers and support for individual Israeli researchers.

This relationship is a testimony to the common language of science and intellectual interchange. It is a devastating commentary on the state of universities and professional organizations today, not only in the U.S. but also elsewhere, that so many, even if a minority, of the faculties and members reject this basic academic principle of free exchange of ideas. It is shameful and disgraceful that groups, such as the American Studies Association in 2013, the American Anthropological Association in 2014, and the American Historical Association in 2016, have passed or have taken seriously resolutions calling for boycott of academic institutions in Israel or making false allegations about the Israeli mistreatment of Palestinians in the field of education.

Those who call for these boycotts should be called by their right name, reactionaries who are preventing intellectual

interchange and hindering progress. One wonders what is the real motive of these prejudiced individuals since most of them know little of the reality of Israeli affairs, and have little love for Palestinians.

One also wonders if the ideological views of these individuals and groups about Israel would be changed by information of some pertinent facts. Do they know that amid the turmoil in the Muslim world in the Middle East, Israel's economy, according to Bloomberg News, continues to grow and is expected to be one of the fastest growing among developed countries? Certainly the EU is aware that Israel is prominent in the high tech field with innovative companies involved in cybersecurity, medical technology, information, and defense technology. More than 1,500 new startups were established in Israel in 2015.

It will come as unwelcome surprise to the boycotters of Israel that 3,000 overseas Israeli researchers are concerned with employment in Israeli academic institutions and businesses. They will also be unhappy by some rapid developments: Chinese businessmen are not only investing heavily in Israeli technological companies, but also every year rapidly increasing that investment. Major companies such as Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing and Bosch are establishing research and development centers in Israel.

Israeli development is taking an unusual turn. The proposal by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to establish a new Druze town in the north of Israel near the city of Tiberius was accepted in January 2016 by Israel's building and planning authorities and approved by Druze political and religious authorities. Druze, who amount to about 130,000 people in Israel, play an increasingly significant role in the life of the country, especially in the military.

This is the first new Druze town to be built by Israel since 1948, and in fact the first time in 130 years that a new Druze

unit has been established in what is now the area of Israel. The new town will join the 18 other Druze towns, 4 in the Golan, and 14 in the Galilee, which are mostly on mountainsides and thus not available for planning. It will be a community settlement, consisting of 400 housing units.

In contrast to this positive Israeli attitude to the Druze population is the continually unfavorable treatment of Christians by Israeli, as well as Palestinian, Muslims. It is sad that the number of Christians in Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus, has declined from 60 per cent of the population when Israel in 1995 handed control of the city to the Palestinian Authority to 20 per cent. This decline is partly due to the redrawing of the boundaries of the city by the PA, and partly to the harassment of Christians by Islamists.

It is even sadder that Bethlehem for a number of years has been the venue for conferences called "Christ at the Checkpoint," that are occasions for expressions of Palestinian nationalism and condemnations of the State of Israel. Some of the attendees call for a Christian jihad and support the terrorist organization Hamas.

Scientific progress and intellectual advancement depend on truth. They are hindered by the lies and deceptions perpetrated by Palestinian organizations and supporters. The supposedly moderate Palestinian group Fatah disseminates the information that Israel steals and harvests the body parts and organs of dead Palestinian terrorists and sells them before giving the bodies to the Palestinian Authority.

The tragedy is that absurdities of this kind are not uttered by ignorant Palestinians and their friends but by officials such as Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of Palestine to the UN, in a letter to UN President Ban Ki-moon on November 5, 2015. Even more disgraceful is the fact these utterances constitute a new version of the historic accusations of blood libel against Jews. Could the basis of the animosity against

Israel by Palestinians and the boycotters of Israel be antisemitism?

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