

Not Quite Free

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Sixty-two years after the rebirth of sovereignty following 2,000 years of exile and powerlessness, the Jewish state is still struggling for real independence. Beyond the genocidal threats from the Iranian leadership and its proxies, European democracies are spending tens of millions of euros, pounds and krona to manipulate Israeli society and politics. This largely hidden European money that funds so-called "civil society" organizations, like B'Tselem, Yesh Din, Ir Amim, the Public Committee Against Torture, Peace Now and dozens more, is undermining Jewish sovereignty and the right to determine our own future.

With such large sums at their disposal, self-appointed leaders of these foreign government-funded nongovernmental organizations (appropriately known as GONGOs) often have greater influence than elected officials. They often set the political agenda, promote their goals in the Knesset and UN and dominate media discussions on Israel.

For example, under the civil society façade, and using European taxpayer money, as well as donations from the New Israel Fund, B'Tselem's offices in London and Washington lobby intensely in support of the blood libels in the Goldstone Report. In parallel, the self-styled Coalition of Women for Peace promotes boycotts, divestment and sanctions and to hurt Israeli firms. And a handful of individuals in Breaking the Silence (BTS), were invited to travel (all expenses paid) throughout Europe to tell the journalists, "intellectuals" and left-wing politicians that Israel, and not Hamas or Hizbullah, is the real "war criminal." BTS films were also shown as part of Israel Apartheid Week activities across campuses last month.

IN THIS form of European neocolonialism, these groups push the policies selected by their patrons, while central topics for Israelis are given short shrift. As a result, few reports by "human rights" groups deal with Gilad Schalit, women victims of Arab honor killings or other issues missing from Europe's agenda.

This funding not only allows GONGOs to manipulate the perception of Israel abroad, but also manipulates the Israeli discourse. In the High Court, many of the cases related to core issues of war and peace, human rights and security are brought by GONGOs that receive the bulk of their funding from European governments. With huge resources, these organizations hire lawyers and run massive media campaigns. In this way, groups like B'Tselem and the Association for Civil Rights in Israel enjoy the unfair advantages of "repeat players" in the legal system.

A number of Israeli government lawyers received fellowships from these narrow ideological groups during their training. And some influential journalists are also closely tied to NGOs funded by the NIF and European governments. It would not be surprising to find the influence of these NGOs in the ideological education of Anat Kamm, who claimed to be exposing IDF “war crimes” when she copied secret military documents and funneled them to a journalist.

Yet, despite the power that these groups exert, neither Israelis nor Europeans know who makes the decisions to disperse this money used to promote the Palestinian narrative, demonize Israelis as war criminals and manipulate public debate. Unnamed officials in Brussels, London, Stockholm, Oslo, The Hague, Madrid, Barcelona, Paris and elsewhere in Europe control relatively large sums with no public accounting.

Every year, the European Union announces major grants under the banner of “Partnerships for Peace,” the “European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights” and other programs, but the crucial details are often hidden from public view. In the individual countries, programs and budgets designed to provide humanitarian assistance are diverted to radical NGOs that promote the same anti-Israel agendas.

The standard explanation is that this European funding reflects support for peace and opposing “occupation.” The US, particularly under Barack Obama, has similar goals, but does not seek to impose them by manipulating Israeli society and politics under the table, or by using Israeli groups to lobby for Goldstone. In refusing to reveal any significant aspects of its decision-making process, the EU is also violating its own transparency rules.

TO REGAIN Israel's lost independence, the first step is to provide the public this information. To this end, a group of Knesset members from a number of parties has introduced legislation that would require funding transparency – particularly regarding monies from foreign governments.

But secrecy is also power, and the NGO officials at the receiving end have mounted a disinformation campaign precisely to prevent such transparency. The legislative draft is portrayed hysterically as “the single most dangerous threat to Israeli civil society since its inception.”

The NGOs fear that if they highlight foreign government funding when engaged in political activities, this might discredit them in the eyes of Israeli society.

This is exactly the public debate that is central to independence and sovereignty, and contrasts sharply with decisions made by anonymous European officials secretly doling out taxpayer funds. NGO officials also claim that the proposed law is unnecessary, and that there is already transparency under existing regulations. If this were the case, they would not be taking out large advertisements and sending floods of panicked e-mails.

After 62 years of independence, there is still much room for improvement. Some aspects will take many years, but others, such as ending the inordinate and secret influence of foreign government on core Israeli decisions, are within our grasp.

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