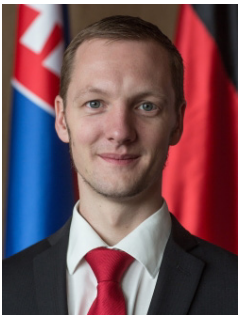




from Josias Terschüren
November 2019



Josias Terschüren

Europe and Israel under a new European Commission

A new beginning, more of the same or downward spiral

Europe has elected and sworn in a new Commission, which took office on December 1st 2019 in challenging times. We have compiled portraits of two leading personalities, who will likely have a great say in the future shaping of EU-Israel relations: Ursula von der Leyen, the new president of the European Commission and her Vice-President Josep Borrell, the new High Representative of the European Union. Furthermore, we include our statement on the recent European Court of Justice's verdict, which stipulates obligatory labelling for Israeli produce originating from beyond the green line.

Ursula von der Leyen

Ursula von der Leyen, Germany's former minister for family affairs and later minister of defense, finally made it to the top of Europe. On December 1st, on the 13th floor of the Berlaymont, she took over the helm of the European Commission from Jean-Claude Juncker. Von der Leyen, the Brussels-born aristocrat, trained medical doctor, mother of seven, and crown-princess of Angela Merkel's grace, succeeded in finally reaching the European Parliament's approval of her commission with the help of Polish and Hungarian Eurosceptic votes. The spotless image of the ever-smiling, multilingual showcase European with her *We can do it!*-attitude and a sixth sense for publicity and self-promotion was recently clouded by a still ongoing Parliamentary Commission Inquiry concerning a consulting issue during her stint at the German Ministry of Defense. The sometimes-unconventional Christian Democrat, known for her rather liberal views on marriage, has a proven and solid track-record on topics pertaining to Jewish or Israel-related issues.



During her tenure as minister of defense, she enabled rabbis and imams to join the German army's chaplain corps and always spoke out against anti-Semitism. Being a strong supporter of the German *raison d'état* to stand for the security of the Jewish State of Israel, military cooperation between Germany and Israel spiked under von der Leyen. During her tenure, Germany greenlighted and subsidized the sale of three Dolphin-class submarines to the Israeli navy. During her visit to Israel as the representative of the German government on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of German-Israeli diplomatic relations, Ursula von der Leyen personally conveyed the German government's decision to sell four top-notch corvettes with Germany again covering roughly one third of their costs. Furthermore, Germany leased Heron-TP drones from Israel at the price tag of roughly 900 million Euros. On policy issues, von der Leyen is a staunch supporter of the two-state solution, called the JCPOA "a proper deal" and rejected the US-position on Jerusalem. With her good transatlantic credentials, the new president of the Commission – who also lived in America for four years – will have to revive and realign the increasingly divided transatlantic relations.

The Middle East Institute has a good take¹ on a possible division on Middle Eastern issues within the new European Commission. The two poles within the Commis-

¹ <https://www.mei.edu/publications/european-commissions-new-president-and-mena-region-status-quo-or-change>



sion will likely be Israel-supportive Ursula von der Leyen and the staunch Israel-critic and new High Representative of the European Union, Josep Borrell.

Josep Borrell

Josep Borrell, is a Catalan socialist, former Foreign Minister of Spain, the new High Representative of the European Union and thereby one of the three Vice-Presidents of the European Commission.



Politico reported in 2012, that Borrell was involved in a conflict of interests-scandal over unreported six-digit-income from an energy company, which led to his resignation as president of the European University Institute.² Borrell's track-record as a staunch Israel-critic shows worrying tendencies and includes outright scandalous remarks and positions, when it comes to the only Jewish state and the Iranian regime. Thus, the Israeli press, including the Jerusalem Post³, the Times of Israel⁴ and Israel Hayom⁵, was awash with highly critical commentaries when Borrell's nomination

became public. But, so was Arab media like the UAE-based newspaper The National which ran the title: "Nomination of Josep Borrell for EU High Representative sparks outcry." The sub headline read: "A supporter of the Iranian regime, Mr Borrell will handle the EU's negotiations on the Iran nuclear deal."

After assuming his post as Spanish Foreign Minister in 2018 he repeatedly advocated a unilateral Spanish recognition of Palestinian statehood. He harshly criticized Trumps decision on Jerusalem and condemned the Israeli handling of the Gaza riots: He wrote in an op-ed about the celebrations on the occasion of the 70th birthday of the modern State of Israel, that they were "covered in blood as this black Monday reflects the dehumanization of the Palestinians by a large part of the Israeli political class and society".

On the other hand, Borrell once lived in Israel, where he got to know his first wife in a kibbutz. He is thus no stranger to the country. During a visit to the Israeli Knesset in 2005 as the President of the European Parliament, he even recognized Israel as being a Jewish state – something European politicians seldom do. But it seems like this time of favor toward Israel may be coming to an end.

Borrell's most scandalous statement regarding Israel came when the outspoken Trump-critic discussed transatlantic relations with Politico. He spoke about a "complete disagreement between the States and Europe," in no uncertain terms: "It's no longer a matter of competitive commercial interests. It's a divorce of values." And then he dropped the bombshell: "Iran wants to wipe out Israel; nothing new about



2 <https://www.politico.eu/article/borrell-forced-to-resign-over-energy-interests/>

3 <https://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Top-EU-foreign-policy-nominee-has-record-of-slamming-Israel-praising-Iran-594633>

4 <https://www.timesofisrael.com/tough-on-israel-fond-of-iran-jerusalem-wary-of-incoming-eu-foreign-policy-czar/>

5 <https://www.israelhayom.com/2019/07/04/eu-appoints-outspoken-israel-critic-foreign-policy-chief/>



that. You have to live with it,”⁶ The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace has a good summary on EU-Israel relations under Mogherini and a sound outlook concerning Mr. Borrell’s tenure.⁷

Labeling Statement I27J

Berlin, November 13, 2019

The decision of the European Court of Justice to label Israeli goods beyond the so-called green line has nothing to do with consumer protection, rather, it is diplomatic policy in disguise – a classic case of double standards against Israel. This was also the view of Dr. Felix Klein, the German Federal Government Commissioner for Anti-Semitism, at the Federal Press Conference on Wednesday morning.

In 2015 we had already reported on the EU Commission’s original guideline on the same matter in detail – its background and objectives. (In German)

There are currently about 200 territorial disputes worldwide, but the Jewish state of Israel is the only one subject to such mandatory measures for labeling its goods. The parallel to the slogan „Germans don’t buy from Jews“ is becoming obvious – European governments should counteract this. We can only endorse former German MP Volker Beck’s proposal in this regard; we consider it fair, appropriate and balanced. Volker Beck had written on Facebook: *“The Federal Government should work to ensure that the Council calls on the Commission to treat all comparable conflicts worldwide in this way in terms of consumer protection and to suspend the enforcement of the European Court of Justice’s verdict in respect to Israel until appropriate legal measures have been taken across the board. In the last 4 years, the Commission has indicated that it is not attempting to apply consumer protection and international law fairly and impartially”*.

We therefore appeal to the designated President of the EU Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, to take decisive and rapid action against the unacceptable difference in treatment of Israel and the politicizing of consumer protection by the EU Commission.

A small side note: The frequently published link between the cause and the terrible and coincidental rocket fire against Israel is neither factually correct nor helpful! The Court’s ruling was preceded by a trial lasting months or even years. The parallelism of events has been unfortunate, but certainly not intentional or long-planned. Arguments have to be made here in a clean and factual manner, without any additional emotionalism due to the confusion with daily political events.

Initiative 27. Januar e.V.

Haus der Bundespressekonferenz
Schiffbauerdamm 40 / 4302
10117 Berlin

Telefon 030 / 12 07 42 28

E-Mail berlin@initiative27januar.org

www.initiative27januar.org

www.facebook.com/initiative27januar

www.youtube.com/initiative27januar

Spendenkonto

Initiative 27. Januar:

Empfänger: Initiative 27. Januar e.V.

Evangelische Bank

Kontonummer: 5 344 166

Bankleitzahl: 520 604 10

IBAN: DE03 5206 0410 0005 3441 66

BIC: GENODEF1EK1

Die Initiative 27. Januar e.V. ist beim Amtsgericht München im Vereinsregister (VR 20 25 70) eingetragen und als gemeinnützig anerkannt. Spenden und Zuwendungen an den Verein sind steuerabzugsfähig. Wenn Sie im Verwendungszweck Ihrer Spendenüberweisung Ihre Adresse angeben, bekommen Sie Anfang des nächsten Jahres für Ihre Spenden des vergangenen Jahres automatisch eine Spendenbescheinigung per Post zugesandt, die zur Vorlage beim Finanzamt dient.



⁶ <https://www.politico.eu/newsletter/brussels-playbook/politico-brussels-playbook-hungarys-change-of-heart-us-eu-relationship-burns-fighting-words/>

⁷ <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/79985>