

## Norway's ambiguous approach towards Israel and Palestine

Forum: The occupation of Palestinian territories since 1967: an analysis of Europe's role

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# Norway's ambiguous approach towards Israel and Palestine

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## ABSTRACT

Norway's ambiguous approach towards Israel and Palestine can be traced back to the 1940s when it was the most pro-Israeli of the three Nordic countries. Since then, there has been a change in perceptions of Israel amongst the Norwegian public and at the official government level. The article follows this change through four crucial phases: the first focuses on the period 1978 up until 1993; the second highlights the Oslo Accords period; the third elucidates the Second Intifada phase and the fourth concentrates on the time of the Gaza war of 2014 up to this day. While Middle East events influenced Norwegian public opinion vis-à-vis Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory, policies of Norwegian governments throughout these periods did not necessarily reflect public opinion. Nowadays, the Norwegian government continues to enhance its economic relations with Israel, in spite of the more pro-Palestinian stance amongst the general public in Norway.

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## Introduction

This contribution traces the dramatic shifts and turning points over the decades in Norway's approach towards Israel and Palestine, in particular in regard to the former's occupation of Palestinian territory (OPT). It does this through an analysis of the changing perceptions of Israel amongst the Norwegian public first from the period 1978–1993, then at the time of the Oslo accords, followed by another pivotal historical moment – the Second Intifada, as well as through the periods of expansion of Israeli settlements and the 2014 Gaza war. In doing so this contribution traces the impact of these key events on Norwegians' (government and general public) stances on the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands. It argues that, in spite of what, on the surface, may appear as an ambiguous strategy of balancing relations between Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), Norway's policies continue to enhance and deepen relations with the occupying power. The article also highlights how the Norwegian government has de-coupled itself from the EU in this regard, although Norway's unilateralism and its independent line from the EU on issues relating to Israel may well, in fact, be a feature of changing governments.

Norway's diplomatic relations with Israel kicked off in 1949 when Norway formally recognized the State of Israel, which in turn contributed to the admission of the latter as a full member of the United Nations. The Norwegian Labour Party (or AP for

*Arbeiderpartiet*) held power from the first post-war elections in 1945 until the 1961 elections and had a pro-Israeli stance. For the majority of non-socialist and Christian Norwegians the new Jewish state represented the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies (NOU, 2000). In this context, the sale of Norwegian military equipment to Israel at that time was broadly acceptable to the Norwegian (Israel-friendly) population. During this period, Norway was in fact the most pro-Israeli of the three Nordic countries and, especially throughout the 1950s, there was a close connection between Norwegian and Israeli Social Democratic government parties.

This sympathetic attitude of the Labour Party towards Israel had not been entirely so prior to 1949. In 1945, the creation of a Jewish state was considered by the AP to be neither possible nor fair. The Party's suggestion was a non-Zionist solution: the assimilation of the Jews in their respective European countries. Norwegian historian Waage (2000) explains the change in the AP's position regarding Israel largely in terms of religious repentance. On 20 November 1949 a plane carrying 27 Jewish children from Tunisia who were to transit through Norway while immigrating to Israel, crashed due to bad weather at Hurum. All children – except one – died. The crash was the second deadliest air disaster in Norway at that time. Public sympathy ran high, and the secretary of the AP, Håkon Lie, started a fundraising campaign to build a Norwegian village, the moshav Yanuv, in Israel.

Following the 1956 Suez crisis and until the 1967 war the majority of the Norwegian population remained largely sympathetic towards Israel. But when Knut Frydenlund of the AP became Foreign Minister in 1973, he played a decisive role in promoting the demands of the Palestinians early on in his political career. In fact in 1974 Norway made a controversial move by giving its support for PLO leader Yasser Arafat to speak for the first time at the UN General Assembly (NUPI, 1974) clearly signaling to Israel that Norway couldn't be taken for granted in terms of its support for Israel and its actions. However, in the same year, Norway was one of eight countries that voted against granting the PLO observer status in the UN General Assembly. At the time, 87 of Norway's 157 parliamentarians were members of what was called the Friends of Israel Foundation (Damen, 2013). This attempt to pursue a balanced approach towards both the Palestinians and the Israelis is a trait that marks the historical development of Norway-Palestine-Israel relations, although on the one hand Norway's public opinion has moved towards a more pro-Palestinian position in more recent times and, on the other, Norway's policies have moved in the opposite direction.

## **Norway and changing perceptions of Israel amongst the Norwegian public 1978–1993**

From 1978 Norway's peacekeeping forces in southern Lebanon (as part of UNIFIL) had an impact on the development of Norwegian attitudes towards the country's relationship with Israel. Thousands of Norwegian soldiers serving in UNIFIL had arrived in Lebanon with sympathy for Israel: the perception of Israel of these soldiers however changed to a much more critical one upon their return back home in Norway (Ness, 1989). The image of Israel also changed amongst several Norwegian politicians and journalists who witnessed at first hand the harassment of the Haddad forces. Moreover, Norway's foreign ministry was concerned about the safety of Norwegian UNIFIL members (Damen, 2013).

As Iran experienced its revolution in 1979, sending the oil markets in turmoil, Norway's position came into focus. Having relied on oil supplies from Iran prior to the revolution, the US and Israel looked to Norway as an alternative supplier. Norwegian diplomat Hans Longva discussed the matter with Yasser Arafat who supported the Norwegian plan to guarantee an oil supply to Israel, on condition that the Norwegians would provide a secret back channel to Israel when needed (Olsen, 2012). During the 1980s the AP decided to reassess its views of the PLO: in December 1982 Frydenlund and other AP politicians had an unofficial meeting with Arafat in Tunis. In 1989 foreign minister Thorvald Stoltenberg heralded a drastic shift through official talks with Arafat.

Stoltenberg managed to do this at a time when the public opinion climate in Norway was more pro-Palestinian: times were shifting (Finnanger, 2015). In 1967, Norwegian public debates referred to the ME conflict as one between Israel and the (slightly vaguely defined) "Arab states" and therefore that at this time it was unthinkable for Norway to acknowledge a Palestinian state. However, Norwegians' opinions about the ME conflict, perceptions of what the conflict is about and who the conflict parties involved are changed between the period 1967 to 1984. This can be explained through a connection between these changes and evolving events in the Middle East. During this period press coverage of the ME conflict in Norway changed significantly as well. During the Six Day 1967 war, coverage in VG (a foreign-owned Norwegian tabloid newspaper) and *Aftenposten* (a moderately conservative newspaper) mainly held more sympathy with Israel than with Egypt. At the time of the Lillehammer affair (21 July 1973) Mossad agents mistook the identity of Ali Hassan Salameh (the target of their operation who had been the chief perpetrator of the terrorist group Black September that had kidnapped and murdered 11 Israeli athletes, officials and trainers at the Munich Olympics in 1972) and killed Ahmed Bouchikhi, a Moroccan waiter and brother of the renowned musician Chico Bouchikhi. The editors of VG and *Aftenposten* were reluctant to condemn Israel for the murder. Six of the Mossad 15 member team were captured and convicted of complicity in the murder by the Norwegian justice system. The coverage in *Aftenposten* and VG of the 1973 Yom Kippur war also revealed a greater sympathy for the Israeli side than for how Egyptians and Syrians experienced the war (Ibid.).

These two newspapers changed tone when in October 1978 it was announced that the Nobel Peace Prize was to go to Egypt's President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin. *Aftenposten* and VG questioned whether the prize should go to Sadat alone given that it was he who had initiated a trip to Jerusalem in November 1977 and thus it was Sadat who had paved the way for the Egypt-Israel peace treaty. Israel was also criticized for its second invasion of Lebanon in 1982 which was (as already mentioned earlier) reinforced by the Norwegian contribution to UNIFIL.

This change of tone also reflected Norwegian public opinion. While in 1967 75% of Norwegians polled reported that they supported Israel, in 1971 67% wanted Israel to retreat to the borders of the pre-Six day war. A December 1973 poll shows that only 12.5% of respondents believed that Norway should support Israel. The late 1970s and early 1980s were in fact marked by an overall decline in support for Israel in Norway (Finnanger, 2015). However, this decline was not necessarily replaced by more sympathy for Palestinians. This was probably due to the negative associations that respondents made with the PLO. Following the 1967 war, press coverage in Norway was dominated by frequent mention of conflicts in the ME region. This led to an impression amongst the public

that the conflict level in the ME was on the increase – an impression that reflected in the low percentage of Norwegians that believed in the possibility of a peace agreement.

Stoltenberg's 1989 opening of official talks with Arafat occurred at a time when most Western countries held at a distance from the PLO, as the latter was designated as a terrorist organization by the US and Israel until the Madrid Conference in 1991. While these Norwegian moves signaled an appreciation and understanding of the rights of the Palestinian people, Norway managed to successfully develop and navigate a relationship with *both* Israel and the PLO, thus continuing its balancing act. In this way it created an impression of neutrality which underpinned the basis for the "Oslo Agreement", in which Norway played an important role (or so it was thought).

### Norway and the Oslo accords

Norway was the location where behind-the-scenes negotiations between the PLO and Israel that led to the signing of the 1993 Declaration of Principles – also known as the Oslo Accords – were held (Waage, 2002, 2004 and 2005). During this period (1990–1997) Norway had a Labour government. The series of secret meetings in Oslo were led by Terje Rød-Larsen, Mona Juul, Jan Egeland and Johan Jørgen Holst (then Foreign Secretary). With this declaration, which was actually signed in Washington, DC, the government of the state of Israel and the PLO team, representing the Palestinian people, agreed to recognize their mutual legitimate and political rights, and to strive to live in peaceful coexistence and mutual dignity and security. The ultimate aim of this declaration was to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace settlement and historic reconciliation through the agreed political process. The agreement led to the first official recognition of Palestinian peoplehood and Palestinians' rights by Israel. However, there was no recognition of Israel as an occupier. Furthermore, there was no "reference to the Palestinian right to self-determination or statehood" (Abu Amr, 1994, p. 78) in the Accords confirming that these accords were never meant to bring about a sovereign State of Palestine (Milton-Edwards & Alastair, 2004; Pace & Sen, *in press*; Persson, 2010).

Norway's "crusader diplomacy" in the most intractable conflict in the Middle East gained the country a lot of prestige and fame. Norway built up an image of a country with moral integrity and a great conflict mediator firmly placing the country on the highest levels of the international peace scene. Oslo specifically became known as the world's "capital of peace." Peace mediation became one of Norway's primary export services. Norway's "value-added component" also came to use in peace processes in Sri Lanka, Cyprus, Sudan, Guatemala, Columbia and the former Yugoslavia (Bullion, 2001; Hæglund & Svensson, 2002; Kelleher, 2006; Kelleher & Taulbee, 2006; Moolakkattu, 2005; Skånland, 2010).

However, the view of Norway amongst the majority of Palestinians, but especially amongst the youth, was quite different, as it emerged from interviews and field observations held by the author, October 2014 in Gaza and during May, June and October 2016 in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Far from being celebrated, Oslo was criticized as the beginning of the end of any hope for meaningful Palestinian sovereignty and as the main set up for the theatrical machinery of the Palestinian Authority as well as the performativity surrounding the notion of a "Palestinian state" (Pace & Sen, *in press*). These

perceptions resonated amongst Palestinians in diaspora, as expressed in interviews held by the author in Copenhagen and London in May 2017.

The Oslo Accords have also been heavily criticized in Norway as raising a false hope for peace in the Middle East. According to Waage (2008) – a renowned expert on Norway-Israel-Palestine relations – Norwegians were very naive to believe that through dialogue and a gradual building of trust, an irreversible dynamic of peace would be created that could push the process forward to a solution. Waage's point is that the entire approach missed the core issue at hand: Norway's facilitative role did not address the power asymmetry between Palestinians and Israelis. "In the end," she argues, "the results that can be achieved by a weak third-party facilitator are no more than the strong party will allow (63)."

At the official level, however, Norway continued its balancing act of assisting Israelis and Palestinians in achieving a supposedly "negotiated" agreement fulfilling the vision of two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. Norway also persisted with its role as chair of the Donor Coordination Group (the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee or AHLC), where both conflict parties participate actively. This can be understood in the context of the political landscape in Norway which generally considers foreign policy as a prerogative of the government, rather than a topic for political parties as such. There is also a long-standing Norwegian tradition of consensus-oriented foreign policy. The general line on the Israel-Palestine issue is just like that of the EU in that a) the occupation is a problem, but the only way to solve it is through direct negotiations between the conflict parties; b) the two-state solution is the only solution c) Norway has an important role through the AHLC and cannot rock the boat because that would undermine that influence.<sup>1</sup>

## **The Second Intifada, Norway's position on Israel and Norwegian public opinion**

In 2002, during the course of the Second Intifada, the IDF launched a large-scale military Operation named "Defensive Shield" in the West Bank. Soon after, *Opinion* conducted an opinion poll for the leading broadsheet newspaper *Aftenposten* which revealed that 44% of Norwegians felt the most sympathy with the Palestinians in the ongoing conflict while only 9% had the greatest sympathy for Israel. Moreover, 68% of the respondents believed that Israel should withdraw from the occupied territories on the West Bank and Gaza Strip – a sharp increase from the 47% that were noted during a similar survey also conducted by *Opinion* for *Bergens Tidende* in 1988. Thus events in the Middle East clearly triggered a shift in Norwegians' sympathy towards Palestinians. This was at a time (between 2001 and 2005) when Norway had a centre-right coalition government with the Christian Democrats (KrF or Kristelig Folkeparti), which was the party of the prime minister. The KrF used to be a staunch supporter of Israel but developed a more balanced stance, losing a fraction of the most right-wing supporters to FRP or Fremskrittspartiet, the People's Progress Party because of this), Høyre (Conservative party) and Venstre (Liberal party which is a centre party).

At the official government level, during 2007, when the Norwegian Labour government was in power, and when Jonas Gahr Støre was Foreign Minister, Norway deviated from its constant support for Israel by recognizing the Hamas unity government after Hamas won



the 2006 Palestinian elections for the second Palestinian Legislative Council or PLC and the legislature of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA). “It would be the height of hypocrisy,” Støre said, “if we saluted the ballot box but refused its result. We must accept the results of the ballot box. But we must also hold accountable any majority which might emerge from elections. Any such majority must abide by international human rights standards ... The Palestinians are suffering a double tragedy – the tragedy of living under occupation, and the tragedy of being divided. In 2007, we decided to engage with the Palestinian national unity government. But the European Union made the mistake of deciding not to engage. We in Norway are prepared to talk to all Palestinian groups, including Hamas, even though we do not recognize its charter, which we find deeply disturbing. We are in favour of Palestinian national reconciliation (Seale, 2012).”

This was a monumental moment when Norway proved its independence from other major European interlocutors in the Middle East saga. In fact, it was the only “Western” country, together with Switzerland, to do so at the time. This shift in policy can be explained by Norway’s commitment to the principles of democracy. The 2006 elections in the OPT were deemed to be the most transparent, free and fair elections in the whole Arab world by the European Parliamentary election monitors (Pace & Pallister-Wilkins, 2018). This conclusion effected public sympathy in Norway which also shifted Government policy since the latter was true to reflecting the Norwegian majority’s opinion. Støre’s policy was to engage with all actors, without necessarily endorsing their policies. To engage was a key principle of the foreign policy of Norway’s centre-left government which came to power in 2005 and was re-elected in 2009. During this period, Norway regularly warned Israel that if it refused to move forward with the political process, it would face donor fatigue, and might itself, as the occupying power, have to assume responsibility for the West Bank Palestinians. But Israel continued its relentless seizure of Palestinian land while counting on foreign donors to continue to finance the PNA.

On January 12, 2011, Jonas Gahr Støre (then Norway’s Foreign Minister) avowed that Norway “could recognize the Palestinian state” and followed this up on 18 July when he claimed that Norway was to recognize Palestine.

On 21 December 2012, MIFF (Med Israel for fred/“With Israel for Peace”) – which keeps a regular track record of sympathy for and against Israel in Norway – quoted an opinion poll (without actually specifying which “poll conducted by one of the major professional Norwegian polling institutes” they had gained access to) and stipulated that only 14 percent of Norwegian youth believed that Israel really wants peace. MIFF also reported that sympathy for Israel and the Palestinians varies across different parts of Norway. In Sørlandet (southern Norway where the Middle East debate is much more polarized), 10% of the population polled had great sympathy for Israel (with a national average of 6 percent) while 9% had greater sympathy for the PA (with a national average of 5 percent) (MIFF, 2012). At the time of the quoted opinion poll (between 2005 and 2013) Norway had a centre left coalition government composed of the AP (Labour party), the Socialist Left party (SV or Sosialistisk Venstreparti) and the centre party (Sp or Senterpartiet). Events in the oPt changed public opinion in Norway. The 2008 and 2012 wars in Gaza as well as the work and reports that emerged from Norway’s civil society groups played a role in exposing Israel’s continued violations of international law in the oPt which in turn effected Norwegians’ opinion about the occupying power.



## Settlements, Gaza war 2014 and impact on Norwegian stance on occupation

In a damning report published in 2013 entitled “Dangerous Liaisons. Norwegian Ties to the Israel occupation”, the NGO Norwegian People’s Aid (NPA) and the Norwegian Union of Municipal and General Employees (Fagforbundet) expose how Norwegian authorities (including municipalities) and companies – through financial investments and trade – are complicit in activities that contribute to Israel’s violations of international law and human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories. The said report goes further to reveal how groups in Norway directly support the occupation through money transfers to individual settlements that are illegal under international law. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) has concluded that Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory including East Jerusalem have been established in violation of international law.

Furthermore, the Government Pension Fund of Norway – Global (or GPF: Norway’s sovereign wealth fund) invested NOK 13,3 million in equities and NOK 11,3 million in fixed assets in Israel (which is the fund’s largest investments in the Middle East region) (see also Bahl, 2017). Moreover, the Israeli government, business sector and academia look to Norway to learn lessons in managing oil and gas revenues and building an energy industry. The report details how the Government Pension Fund of Norway – Global (GPF) and 13 private Norwegian banks and investment funds are implicated in the occupation and related violations. Twelve such companies are considered to be particularly involved in serious violations, including: the building of key infrastructure in the oPt, the provision of essential factors of production for the construction of settlements or the Wall, as well as heavy machinery used to destroy Palestinian homes and infrastructure, the extraction of non-renewable natural resources from occupied areas, and the development and provision of technology and systems contributing to Israeli military control and the restriction of freedom of movement. Israelis journalists have also reported on the working environment legislation which is not enforced in the Israeli industrial zones in the West Bank where many Palestinians work. It is often the case that Palestinian workers receive too little pay. The Mishor Adumim industrial zone on the outskirts of Jerusalem is one of the largest Israeli industrial zones in the West Bank. Mishor is linked to the Ma’ale Adumim settlement, the third largest settlement in the West Bank. The purpose of the project is to cut the link between Jerusalem and the West Bank by expanding the industrial zone/settlement. Mishor has a lot of industry that produces waste that is hazardous to the environment. SodaStream, the producer of home carbonating devices, had its main factory in the Mishor Adumim industrial zone (it moved its production out of Mishor in December 2015). The company sells its products to Norway. Mishor includes other companies that the Norwegian Government Pension Fund Global (SPU) owns shares in: these include Mayer’s Cars and Trucks, the official representative of the Volvo Group in Israel and Rami Levy and Shufersal, two supermarket chains (Moa, 2013, p. 22).

The report’s authors argue that these companies’ activities are in breach of GPF guidelines. Such reports leave a negative imprint amongst the general public in Norway vis-à-vis Israel and its occupation of Palestinian land.

In July 2014, in a strongly worded message, Jonas Gahr Støre of Norway’s Labour Party, Stefan Löfven of Sweden’s Social Democrats, Árni Páll Árnason of Iceland’s Social

Democratic Alliance and Antti Rinne of Finland's Social Democrats all added their names to a letter which condemned Israel's use of "disproportionate violence" during the 2014 Gaza war and called on Israel to end its blockade of Gaza and occupation of the West Bank. This letter was initially meant to be a unified Nordic message but then Danish Prime Minister (Social democrat) Helle Thorning Schmidt refused to sign (The Local Denmark, 2014).

But this message again exposed the realities on the ground for Palestinians living under Israeli military occupation to the scrutiny of the Norwegian public. It is therefore argued there that Norway is actually de-coupling from itself with regard to Israel and especially on the issue of Israeli settlements. In the main, Norwegian public opinion and civil society would much rather align with and support the EU's differentiation policy, in line with UNSC 2334. (United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334 was adopted on 23 December 2016. It concerns the Israeli settlements in "Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem". The resolution states that Israel's settlement activity constitutes a "flagrant violation" of international law and has "no legal validity". It demands that Israel stop such activity and fulfil its obligations as an occupying power under the Fourth Geneva Convention). However, the current Norwegian government, made up of a right of centre coalition and which has been in power since September 2013, has instead enhanced cooperation with Israel with fewer strings attached than what the EU differentiation policy calls for. This applies to new trade deals, gas exploration, etc. This exposes how the Norwegian government's policy no longer reflects the opinion of the majority of the Norwegian public: a worrying trend that shows how even long standing democracies can start to erode from within.

On 16 August 2017 the Palestine Committee of Norway published a report detailing the various political parties' responses to 8 questions set by this committee in cooperation with the Joint Committee for Palestine. The Progress Party did not agree with the premise of the questions and therefore chose to answer the questions without considering the options provided. Their position on the recognition of a Palestinian state is that doing so now will be devastating to the peace process. Moreover, the Frp holds that the areas in which petroleum activities are conducted between Norway and Israel are not contested by the party. The party holds that cooperation with Israel within the petroleum sector is good for Norway. Furthermore the Frp's position on the Government's Global Pension Fund which invests in Israel (including in settlements) continues because it provides a good return for the Fund and thus favourable for the Norwegian economy: clearly the Frp does not follow an ethical foreign and economic policy. Thus, on the one hand, the FrP, the country's third largest political party (a party which used to be highly bourgeois but is now mostly charismatically Christian – an interesting shift given that there is very little by way of overlap between the two groups)<sup>2</sup> and a part of the centre-right government coalition seem to be home to the pro-Israel lobby.

On the other hand, at time of writing (2018), there seems to be an unequivocal and fairly steady shift in Norwegian public opinion away from supporting Israel towards seeing Israel as the oppressor of Palestinians, and as at least an equal if not more aggressive part in the Middle East context generally. This would point to an increasing disconnect between, on the one hand, the Norwegian government's stance vis-à-vis Israel and, on the other, the Norwegian public's perception of the occupying power in the OPT.

## Norwegian government and public opinion on the occupation: a summary analysis

The above being noted, it is important to observe that some differences between the parties actually exist. In terms of the political parties in the Norwegian parliament there is today only one clearly pro-Israel party – the Progress Party (FrP). In fact the FrP (right wing populists), as well as parts of the Christian Democratic party, are even pushing for Norway to follow Trump's example regarding the embassy move to Jerusalem. The two socialist parties, SV and Rødt, advocate on the contrary an economic boycott of Israel. The SV called for a re-evaluation of Norwegian policy towards Israel and Palestine, but the parliament voted against it. Parts of the Labour Party advocate supporting the EU differentiation policy. The Labour Party has gradually moved towards supporting the recognition of a Palestinian state (in 2015) even without the existence of a peace agreement between the parties. This was an important step from the previous position – which was that the recognition of Palestine could only be offered as a result of a negotiated peace agreement with Israel. However, the government coalition, which includes FrP, sustains its support for “the goal of Israel and Palestine as two states within secure and internationally recognized borders” (Government of Norway, 2018).

In terms of differences between some of the Nordic countries today, Sweden has taken the step of recognizing Palestine as a state. As the Israeli government has often refused to meet with Swedish representatives and denied Sweden access to Gaza (cf. Eriksson in this special issue), the Swedish case is often used negatively in Norway as an example of why rocking the boat is negative.

### Conclusion

This contribution has sought to present the evolution of Norway's ambiguous approach towards Israel and the OPT.. In doing so it has been important to follow both the position of Norwegian governments, politicians and political parties in power over time, as well as public opinion. The point was made that events in the OPT have had an impact on the change recorded over time in Norwegians' perception about Israel as the occupying power. At the government level, although Norway often deviated from the EU's position – as in 2006 when Norway recognized the Hamas government – what is more noticeable is that Norway's official policy does not always reflect the will of the majority of its population. As has been shown, Norway's public opinion and civil society would prefer their country to support the EU's differentiation policy which states that Israel's settlement activity is a clear violation of international law and demands that Israel stops such activity. Yet, Israel continues to enjoy a very positive diplomatic relationship with Norway, just as it did since its founding in 1948 (Waage, 2000).

In 2014 (one year after leaving office), the Labour Minister Espen Barth Eide declared that alternatives to the EU's much emphasised “two-state solution” should be considered, implying that the solution might indeed be that of a one state (in Omvik & Fjeld, 2014). But the current government from the political right (since 2013) has turned more pro-Israel in its political rhetoric and action.

Another development worth noting is that during its latest congress in May 2017 the Norwegian trade unions, LO, which is very close to the Labour Party, agreed on a boycott of Israel, going against the policy of the Labour party (Grande, 2017).

While seemingly ambiguous and at times contradictory, with Norway recognizing the Palestinian national unity government in 2007 and with the government's pension fund divesting from three Israeli companies due to construction activity in East Jerusalem in 2014, Norway continues to expand its economic relations with Israel, as reports from 2013 and 2017 expose. It can thus be concluded that Norway's unilateralism or its independent line from the EU on issues relating to Israel (as in labelling of goods from settlements) may well be a feature of changing governments, although the political line may change.

## Notes

1. Author communications with Jørgen Jensehaugen, 7th June 2018.
2. Discussions held by the author with Iver B Neumann and with Are Hovdenak, 6th June 2018. See also Andersen and Bjørklund (1990).

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