

# Unraveling the Belgian BDS connection

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Gerald Steinberg

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September 9, [Brigitte Herremans](#) arrived at Ben Gurion airport, planning to lead an “alternative tour” of political activists, as she had done many times before. But this time, the polite-sounding Belgian activist was not given the usually automatic tourist visa. Instead, by her own account, she was unceremoniously denied entry and turned back.

Brigitte Herremans is in many ways typical of Western European leaders of BDS and demonization campaigns. Her official title is Policy Officer for the Middle East at [Broederlijk Delen](#) (BD) meaning “fraternal sharing”— an influential and semi-official Belgian Flemish Catholic aid organization. (She plays a similar role in another Catholic NGO — Pax Christi.) They claim to combat poverty and inequality by working with local organizations, but are tainted with a radical political agenda that includes intense demonization of Israel. Out of the €6 million annual budget provided by Belgian taxpayers, €264,000 goes to political projects in “Israel/Palestine” that have nothing to do with aid. This is Herremans’ radical mini-empire.

The blatant anti-Israel agenda and Palestinian victimization narrative reflects the Western European norm, including strong Christian theological echoes and a patronizing neo-colonial relationship with Palestinians. BD’s website states: “Unlike the Palestinian people, the Israeli people has more than 60 years of statehood, established on 78% of historic Palestine” a standard slogan that erases the history of wars, terrorism and hate. Herremans is not a terrorist — she echoes the soft form of warfare, and in this spirit, BD held a public event on [“Peaceful resistance in Palestine and Israel”](#) in May 2016. “Resistance” is the goal – not peace and security based on mutual recognition and compromise.

Like many European political warriors, Herremans embraces BDS soft-power attacks, and her organization participated in [“Trading Away Peace”](#) (2012) — a major NGO campaign that lobbied the EU and individual European governments to impose

economic sanctions against Israel. Among many other examples, in 2013, Herremans wrote an article commemorating the “Nakba” (the Palestinian version of the 1948 war).

Furthermore the “Alternative Tours/Political Tours” that she runs (or at least ran until she was sent home), meet exclusively with groups that demonize Israel, and blame the conflict entirely on the post-1967 “occupation.” Israelis, including victims of Palestinian terror, are erased (“invisible others”), and participants are shielded from any contact with the reality that might raise questions about the narrative. As a result, they come home having seen and heard only one side and ready to participate and lead BDS campaigns.

In parallel, this agenda that feeds hatred of Israel and Jews in Europe is supported and reinforced through funding of radical NGOs. Broederlijk Delen funnels €40,000 per year to Zochrot, a fringe anti-Zionist group that campaigns for the so-called Palestinian “right of return” as part of a “one-state framework” that would eliminate the State of Israel.

Another NGO, known as Defense for Children International-Palestine received €40,000 in 2014 — used for BDS and for an insidious campaign that seeks to further poison the perception of Israel through false or entirely distorted allegations involving minors (many of which are exploited for terror and violence.) Other political NGOs with similar agendas, including Breaking the Silence, Adalah and Gisha, receive Broederlijk Delen funding.

With this background, it is not surprising that the Israeli border authorities did not consider Herremans to be a tourist, but rather, a radical leader of political warfare, and, as is the practice in other Western democracies, denied her a visa.

Upon her return to Belgium, Herremans immediately provided further evidence of her deeply ingrained hostility. In an interview on Flemish Radio 1 on 12 September, Herremans repeated her support for “sanctions against Israel” and demanded that Israeli citizens who come to Belgium (actual tourists, not activists) be subject to “interrogation.” In the same interview, when asked about reports that showed a rise in antisemitism in Belgium, Herremans accused “Israel’s allies” of “inflating” the level of antisemitism in order to “distract from its treatment of Palestinians.” Following the standard script particularly in Europe, Herremans was criticized by Michael Freilich, the editor-in-chief of the Jewish newspaper Joods Aktuel, and she was defended by Emmanuel Stein, a member of the far-left group A Different Jewish Voice in an op-ed in the De Morgen daily in which Stein said he was “deeply ashamed” over Freilich’s words.

On Facebook, Herremans declared “...I had anticipated the possibility of deportation as Israel is stepping up its efforts to smother dissent and human rights’ activism in

Palestine & Israel and abroad...” Her twitter account was active with a series of attacks on Israeli democracy, further demonstrating her constant political activism which advocates for the economic demise of the State of Israel.

She also posted a picture of the fringe anti-Zionist Neturai Karta, a group often used as “kosher” affirmation to promote demonization of Israel while countering criticism of blatant antisemitism, accompanied by the claim that: “Within the Jewish community, there are plenty of visions of #Israel..Civilized disagreements are a blessing.”

The case of Brigitte Herremans and Broederlijk Delen is an example of the dangers and consequences of entrusting radical ideologues with public funds that are used to fuel conflict and hate. Perhaps the Israeli refusal to let her use the facade of tourism to promote this campaign will trigger a long overdue change that will allow the funds provided by Belgian citizens to be used for positive objectives.

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*Gerald M. Steinberg is a political science professor at Bar Ilan University, and president of NGO Monitor, a research institute in Jerusalem.*