

# Euro President Barroso: Freeze Funding for Political NGOs

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**O**n the occasion of the first official visit to Israel by José Manuel Barroso, the President of the European Commission, I offer a modest proposal to our honored guest.

This initiative stems from a desire to assist our European friends in strengthening democratic frameworks and reducing wasteful public spending, while also making a positive contribution to peace.

The European Union and many of its 27 member states are in the midst of a life-threatening economic crisis, and it is our duty to help them. Democracies should help each other, and since Europeans work overtime in trying to help us solve our problems, it would be only right to reciprocate.

To this end, I suggest an immediate freeze in billions of Euros provided by European **governments** to **non-government** organizations (NGOs) involved in political advocacy. In recent decades, European democracy took a wrong turn, and the clear distinction between democratic state institutions and private unaccountable “civil society” got lost.

If this funneling of taxpayer funds to political advocacy NGOs was limited to the borders of Europe, that would be their problem, but the EU exports this bad habit, focusing intensively on Israel. Dozens of fringe Israeli, Palestinian and European political advocacy groups [receive money from the EU and its member states](#), impacting on our democracy.

In the period beginning in 1999 (and perhaps earlier), an estimated one billion euros have poured from government coffers into the bank accounts of “non-government organizations” (NGOs) that claim to promote peace, human rights, democracy and other worthy causes in our part of the world. Approximately €100 million is disbursed annually, and this funding has become the most visible and problematic expression of European policy in Israel.

If this largesse has provided benefits, such positive impacts are very difficult to discern. Since there either are no evaluations, or ones that do exist are closely held secrets, European officials

and taxpayers have no idea what, if anything, they might be getting for all this money.

If they start to look, they will find that in many cases, the results are counterproductive. European taxpayers subsidize many groups that promote the invented narrative of Palestinian victimization and Israeli aggression. These NGO campaigns, including numerous false accusations of Israeli “war crimes” and the immoral exploitation of “apartheid” are part of a political war against Israel.

This NGO-led war is the antithesis of promoting peace through mutual understanding. As a result, while the EU advertises an NGO funding program entitled “Partnerships for Peace”, there are few significant partnerships, and not much movement towards peace.

However, because the details of this and many other NGO funding processes are classified top secret (while European officials preach the merits of transparency to others), little is known about them. Are the officials and advisors who select the NGO recipients (often the same groups year after year) competent? Do they have conflicts of interest? Are they motivated by political, ideological or other private interests and objectives? Nobody, including members of parliament, knows, because everything is secret.

This secrecy is protected by a policy of non-answers to questions related to NGO funding. The standard EU response to questions is that funds are provided to specific NGO projects, meaning that the wider activities of the NGO and its officials are supposedly irrelevant. In reality, whenever a donor, including the EU, provides funds, it assumes responsibility and becomes an enabler for all of the NGO’s activities.

By invoking convoluted logic, EU officials have sought to avoid discussion of their funding for highly controversial Israeli political NGOs such as Adalah, Parents Circle, Israel Committee Against House Demolitions, Ir Amim, Breaking the Silence, Machsom Watch, Yesh Din, Gisha etc. All are involved, in various ways, in promoting the Palestinian narrative.

President Barroso’s official visit is an opportune time for ending the secrecy and undertaking a serious and independent review, as a number of EU grants for political NGOs end in June and July 2012. This review should examine the general questions regarding transfer of taxpayer funds to private political advocacy NGOs, particularly outside of Europe. And by removing the secrecy and reforming the process, an independent examination would remove one of the major sources of friction between Israelis and Europeans, while contributing to the substance of peace, in contrast to the façade.

At the same time, Europe can use the savings to help Greece and Spain, for a start, and diminish the wider economic crisis. As noted above, a modest proposal.