



## Significant differences in mutual perceptions between Europe and Israel

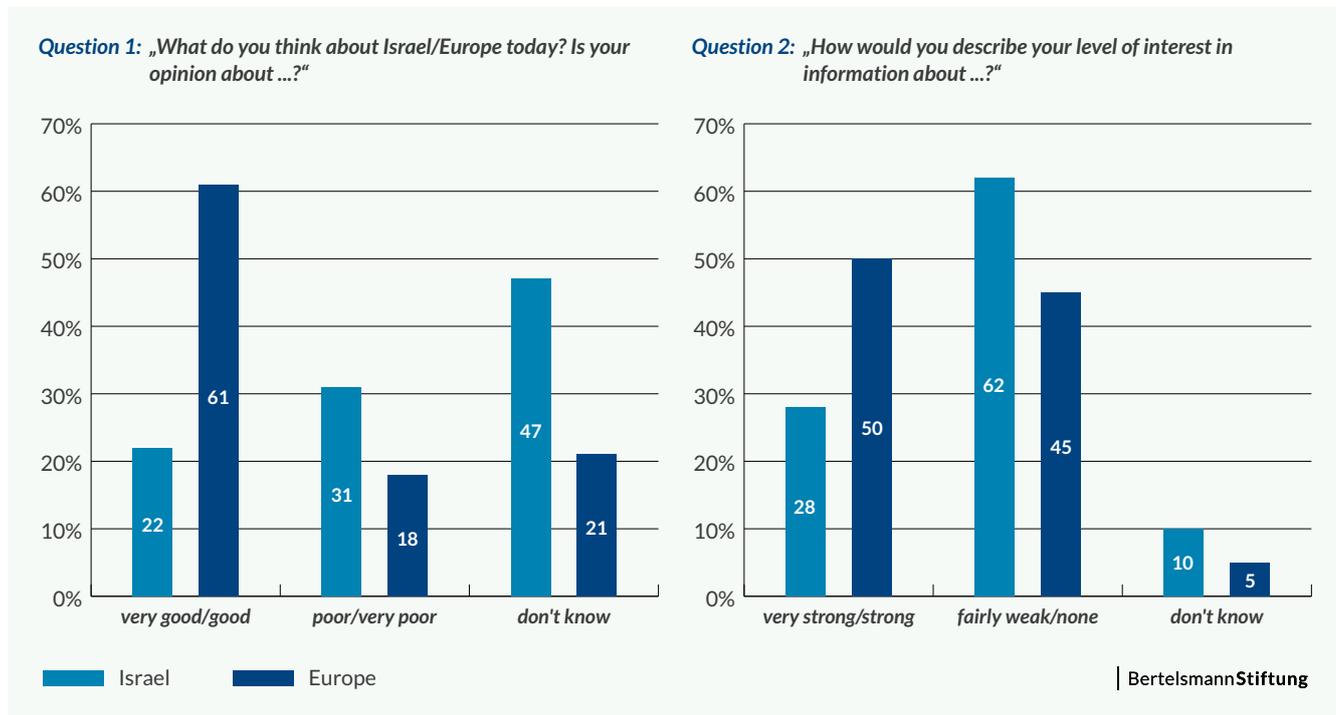
According to a Bertelsmann Stiftung survey, Europeans are much more critical toward Israel than is true of the reverse. There is also a lack of agreement on the issue of Europe's responsibility for Israel.

**In a survey carried out at the beginning of 2020, a total of 10,122 citizens either of Israel or one of eight European countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Spain, Poland, the United Kingdom, Italy and the Netherlands) were questioned online regarding their attitudes toward each other.**

While a majority of Israelis have a good or very good opinion of Europe, Europeans' views on Israel are overwhelmingly negative or indifferent (Question 1). For example, 61 percent of Israelis expressed positive opinions regarding Europe, while only about 20 percent of Europeans displayed a positive attitude toward Israel. Belgian respondents, nearly 40 percent of whom expressed a negative stance on this question, displayed the most strongly negative opinions of Israel among the Europeans surveyed, followed by the populations in

Poland (38 percent) and Spain (37 percent). Education level has a significant influence on respondents' opinion in this regard: 26 percent of respondents with a high level of education expressed positive opinions toward Israel, as compared to just 19 percent of respondents with a low level of education. Much the same is true within Israel, where respondents with a high level of education expressed positive opinions of Europe to an above-average extent (68 percent). Only the youngest group of Israelis surveyed, between the ages of 14 and 20, showed an even more positive stance. Among this group, 73 percent view Europe favorably.

As in the case of opinions about each other, an imbalance is evident with regard to each side's interest in the other. While half of all Israelis surveyed indicated they were interested in information about Europe, just over



one-quarter of the surveyed Europeans expressed an interest in information from the Mediterranean country (Question 2). Poland and Germany deserve special attention here in comparison to the rest of Europe. More than two-thirds of the Poles surveyed expressed little or no interest in Israel. In Germany too, a high level of disinterest was evident, with 65 percent of German respondents indicating that they had little or no interest in Israel. However, the degree of interest in information about the other country or region correlates strongly with respondents' level of education: The higher the education level, the greater the share of respondents expressing interest in Israel.

The sources used to obtain information about the other country or region vary as greatly as do the opinions about one another. While a majority of Israelis (59 percent) get their information about Europe online, traditional media sources predominate among the European respondents, with half gaining their information about Israel via TV and newspapers, and only 28 percent using sources from the Internet. Unsurprisingly, young European respondents between the ages of 14 and 20 are more likely to lean toward online sources, with 41 percent of this group receiving their information about Israel via the internet (online news platforms and social media). This is not unambiguously true

for the group of Israeli respondents of the same age. Although young Israelis use social media as source of information about Europe above average, their usage of online news portals is below average.

### Role played by the Holocaust in shaping relations

The significance of the Holocaust for current relations was also seen differently by respondents in Europe and in Israel. While three-quarters of Israelis are of the opinion that Europe has a special responsibility toward the Jewish people, only 57 percent of Europeans agree (and just 55 percent of Germans; Question 3). Views regarding Europe's responsibility toward Israel are similarly divergent (Question 4). Two-thirds of all Israelis surveyed ascribe responsibility toward Israel to Europe; however, just under 40 percent of Europeans share this view (including a similar share in Germany). A majority of Europeans thus regard Europe as holding responsibility toward the Jewish people. However, this is not paired with a similarly strong perception of a special responsibility toward the state of Israel. Young people in Europe make the clearest distinction between

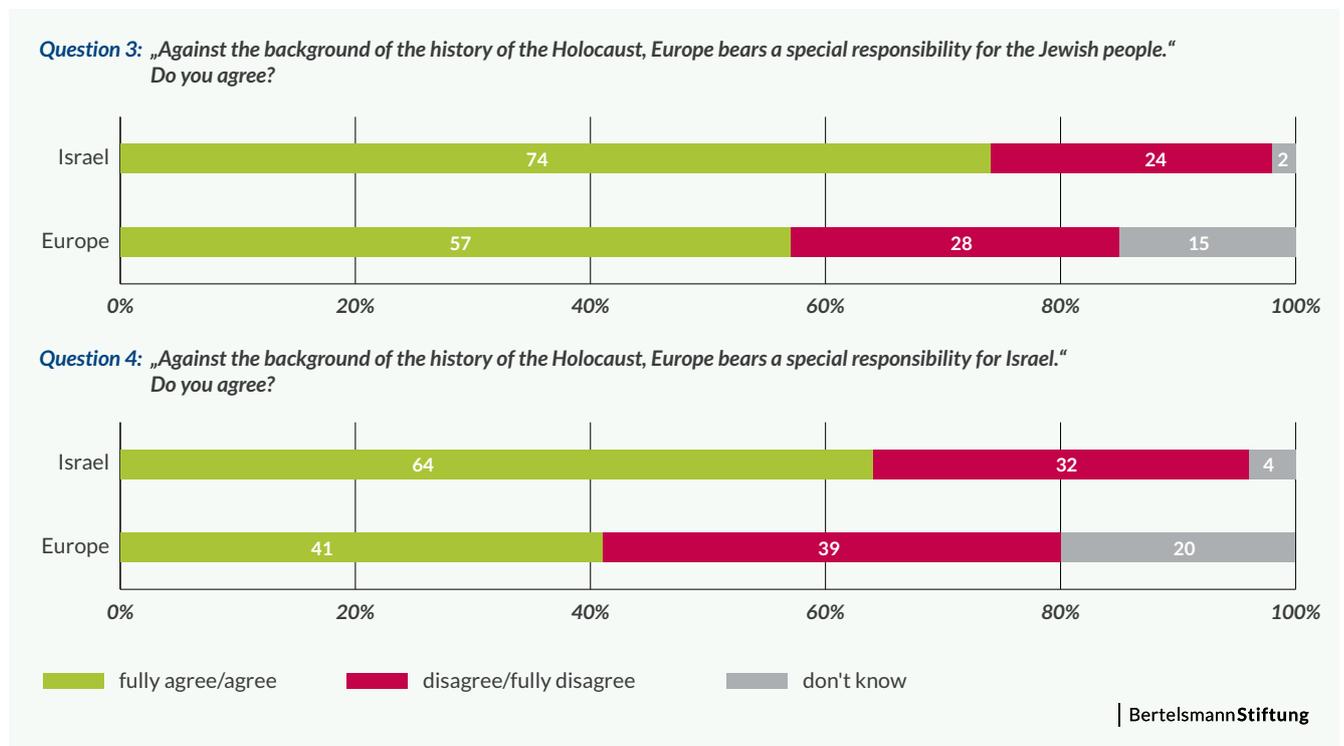
responsibility toward the Jewish people vs. Israel: 55 percent of Europeans between the ages of 14 and 20 see Europe as having a responsibility toward the Jewish people, but only 35 percent see a similar responsibility toward the state of Israel. The Israelis surveyed also make a distinction between the two questions. In this case, 74 percent regard Europeans as having a responsibility toward Jews around the world, while 64 percent – 10 percentage points fewer – regard Europe as having a similar responsibility toward the state of Israel.

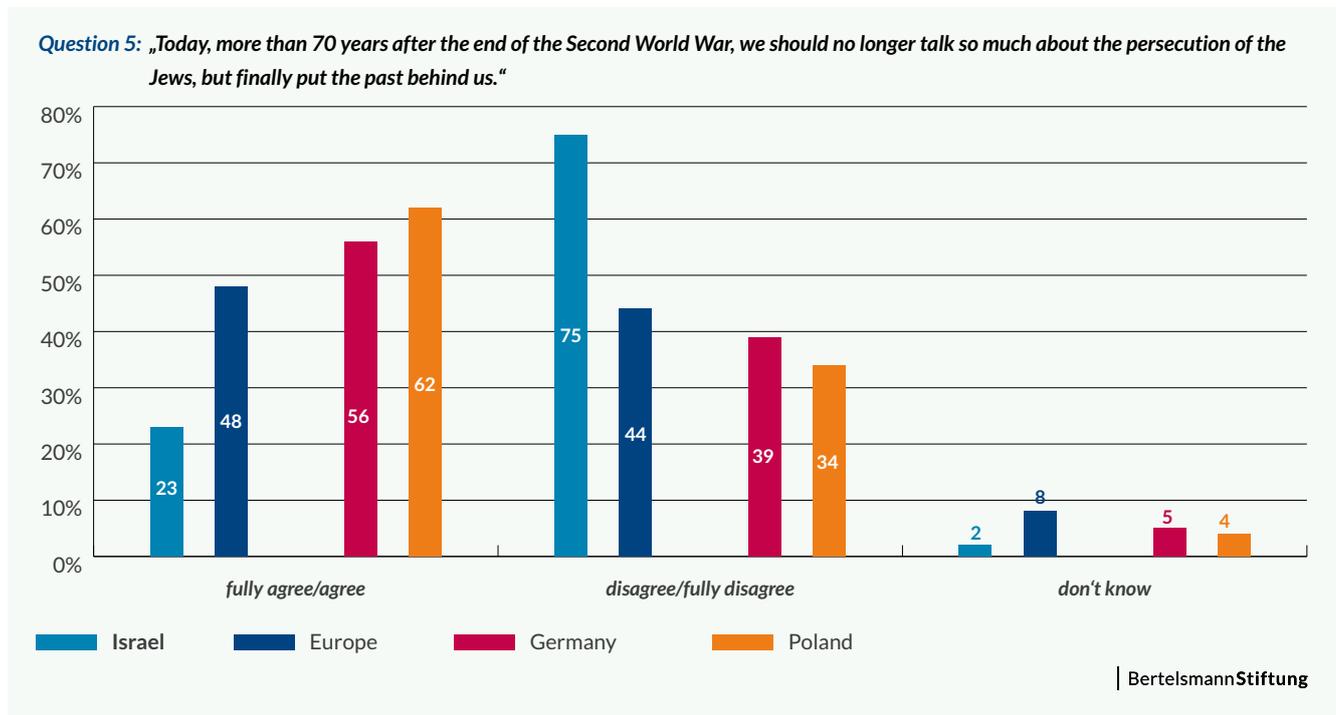
As a cross-European average, nearly one-half (48 percent) are of the opinion that 70 years after the end of World War II, there should now be less discussion about the persecution of the Jews (Question 5). In Poland, 62 percent of respondents expressed this opinion. In Germany, a total of 56 percent agreed with this statement. Moreover, a total of 32 percent of the German respondents – more than half of that original 56 percent – said they “fully” agreed with this statement, the highest such share within any of the European countries. Israeli respondents see this quite differently, with three-quarters having no desire to turn the page altogether on this chapter of history.

Among the Italian respondents, a very different picture appears than is captured by the European average. Across all questions in the survey, Italians express the most positive sentiments toward Israel. It is the only country in which a clear majority (59 percent) opposes drawing a line under society’s discussion of the persecution of the Jews in World War II. Young Italians in particular are in favor of continued remembrance: 66 percent of this group disagreed with the statement that there should be less discussion of the persecution of the Jews, with 45 percent “fully” disagreeing. Only the Israeli respondents show a similarly high value on this question.

### Visibility of Jewish life, and interactions with one other

European participants in the study were also asked about the frequency of their interactions with people of the Jewish faith. A total of 16 percent indicated that they often or very often interact with people of the Jewish faith (Question 6). A look at the results from individual countries also reveals interesting results.





For example, France is home to an estimated 449,000<sup>1</sup> Jewish people, the largest Jewish community in Europe. Accordingly, the share of French respondents indicating that they often interact with Jewish people (21 percent) is above the European average. Italy, though it has a similar overall population size, is home to far fewer Jewish people (around 27,000).<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, about 21 percent of Italians also said that they often interact with Jewish fellow citizens. With about 118,000 Jewish people living within its borders, Germany is home to a community about three times as large as that in Italy. However, only 11 percent of the German survey participants indicated that they have frequent contact with members of this population.

As the analysis of the figures shows, there is a correlation between interaction with Jewish individuals and the perceptions of Jewish people and Israel. For example, Europeans who have personal contact with Jewish citizens are more likely to agree that Europe has a special responsibility toward the Jewish people and the state of Israel. In addition,

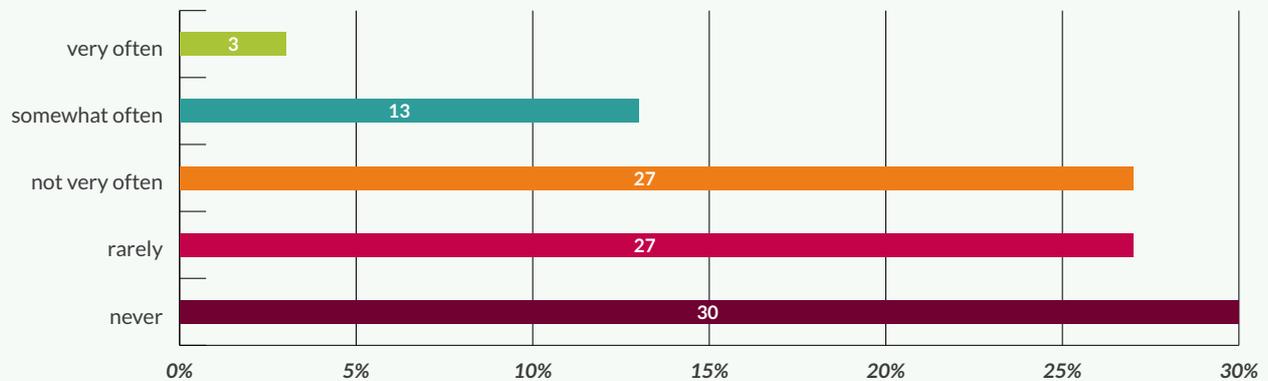
1 Figures on the Jewish population in Europe are based on the most recent report by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research, London, October 2020, [https://www.jpr.org.uk/documents/JPR\\_2020.Jews\\_in\\_Europe\\_at\\_the\\_turn\\_of\\_the\\_Millennium.pdf](https://www.jpr.org.uk/documents/JPR_2020.Jews_in_Europe_at_the_turn_of_the_Millennium.pdf), p.14

2 [https://www.jpr.org.uk/documents/JPR\\_2020.Jews\\_in\\_Europe\\_at\\_the\\_turn\\_of\\_the\\_Millennium.pdf](https://www.jpr.org.uk/documents/JPR_2020.Jews_in_Europe_at_the_turn_of_the_Millennium.pdf), p. 14

people who have comparatively more frequent contact with Jewish individuals tend to have more positive views regarding Israel, and show more interest in information from that country.

## Conclusion

The results of the survey show a significant imbalance in perceptions and expectations between Israeli and European citizens. While a majority of Europeans show little interest in Israel, Europe plays a far greater role for many of the Israelis surveyed. In addition to this interest in present-day Europe, a majority of Israelis also see Europe – given the history of the Holocaust – as having an ongoing responsibility toward the Jewish people and toward Israel. In this regard, both Europeans and Israelis clearly differentiate between responsibility toward the Jewish people and toward the state of Israel. Finally, the results also suggest that interaction is a key factor in shaping the mutual perceptions of Europeans and Israelis.

**Question 6:** „How often would you say you interact with Jewish people?“

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**Additional information**

The results reported here are based on an international comparative survey conducted by Dalia Research in cooperation with eupinions (<https://bit.ly/35DHPK8>) between 27 November 2019 and 14 January 2020 on behalf of the Bertelsmann Stiftung. As a part of the study, data from eight selected country samples and Israel were evaluated, with the following participant figures: Belgium n=1,013; Germany n=1,786; Spain n=1,067; France n=1,394; United Kingdom=1,390; Italy n=1,301; Netherlands n=1,062; Poland n=1,109; and Israel n=1,073). In order to adjust key sociodemographic characteristics to match their actual distribution in the population, the data was weighted on the basis of Eurostat statistics. The target weighting variables included age, gender, education level and degree of urbanization (rural and urban populations). An iterative algorithm was used to identify the optimal combination of weighting variables based on the composition of the specific country samples. The overall estimated design effect based on the distribution of weights is calculated at 1.25. For a random sample of this size, taking the design effect into account, there would be a margin of error of +/-1 percent, with a confidence level of 95 percent.

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