

A New Academic Structure at the National University of Political Science and Public Administration (NUPSPA): The Center of Israeli Studies

The establishment of the Center of Israeli Studies within NUPSPA as a teaching and research structure requires some clarifications and explanations. In the contemporary academic world, there is an ever growing trend towards a deeper knowledge of various areas of world civilization, towards deepening the information on their spiritual anatomy, political structures and economic interests. The development and diversification of regional studies, as an expression of this trend, is a relevant phenomenon connected to university life. Grasping different realities enriches knowledge and facilitates the understanding of highly complex phenomena. In this sense, it is worthwhile mentioning the emergence of American Studies, East-Asian Studies, Mediterranean Studies etc. The very concept - which is quite wide - of European Studies, in a continuous expansion, is the expression of the dynamics pertaining to regional studies. This is the context in which the new academic structure of Israeli studies was created.

In addition, there are other reasons pertaining to the dynamics of a highly-specific society, as follows.

1. Israel represents a spectacular rebirth of a state structure after a “break” of almost 2.000 years.
2. The unusual process of formation of specific state institutions (main political institutions, defense bodies, banking and economic institutions, political parties, trade unions etc.) started long **before** the proclamation of the State. Their activities provided a daily approach to the problems that the population faced and actually led to the “emergence status” of the future state, despite very difficult conditions.
3. A set of social policies for the absorption and integration of human groups that came from extremely different geographical, cultural, linguistic, mental and political areas. These policies entailed a complex series of activities: providing a habitat for the “newcomer” (*Ole Hadash*) and hence a policy of territorial organization, of urbanism that was different from other parts of the world; education, beginning with learning Hebrew - which was unknown to most “newcomers”, as well as assuring an education system at all levels, which, apart from the traditional goals of the school, also focused on a process of integrating children and youngsters coming from very different backgrounds. A series of specific institutions were established and improved, in order to facilitate integrations, such as “absorption centers” (“*Merkeaz Klita*”) - having educational, social and vocational guidance roles. Also, a

specific educational structure was set up for adults to learn Hebrew (“*ulpan*”). This policy of integration - particularly complex and unique in the world - created in fact a new Israeli nation, with its own features and ethos.

4. The development of a defensive system, in conditions of maximum difficulties. This popular army structure (*The Tzahal*), which was tested from the very first day after the proclamation of the Israeli state, had and still has a fundamental role in protecting the new state and in assuring a normal life for the population. At the same time, the army had an important role in the already mentioned integration process, to the extent that it contributed to erasing cultural differences.
5. The development of a unique social and economic institution in the world: the Kibbutz. The *Kibbutz* is a very important cooperative structure. It had a fundamental role in the economy, in particular due to having created a modern agriculture. Later on, it provided shelter for various hi-tech, electronics and tourism promotion organizations. “The Sons of the Kibbutz” had an important role in defending the country. Even if the Kibbutz is a declining phenomenon today, it still is quite important.
6. Another structure, which is different from other geopolitical areas, is that of Unions. *Histadruth* (translated as “The Federation” - that is the Federation of workers committees) is an original body which, besides the traditional functions of defending the workers’ interests, is also an entrepreneur, owning corporations, store holdings, a medical insurance company, research bodies etc. It had a huge economic and political role, despite the fact that it is currently decreasing.
7. Developing a competitive economy in extremely harsh conditions: scarce natural resources and political difficulties. In its 65 years of existence, Israel restored the agricultural use for large desert areas and developed original economic structures. Israel avoided industrialization - with some exceptions - and went directly to the “post-industrial” age.
8. The Center for Israeli Studies at NUPSPA is intended to be also focused on difficult problems, unresolved issues in the Israeli society, such as the relation between state and religion etc.

In an institution of education for government such as the National University of Political Science and Public Administration, broadening the knowledge of various forms of political organization can only be beneficial. CSIs fits into the category of regional centers and study programs that meet the intellectual interests of the students and emphasizes, once more, the variety of political realities.

One more issue is in need of clarification. I would particularly like to make a difference between the academic scope of the Center of Israeli Studies and

two other related academic fields: the centers of Jewish studies and the centers of Middle-East studies. As far as the connection to Jewish studies is concerned, there are many common features. For example, one cannot ignore specific issues pertaining to the history of the Jewish people. Modern Hebrew, for example, will be studied. We shall also be very interested in studying political life as part of Jewish history, especially in analyzing a very innovative self-governing structure: The Community (*Kehillah*) that functioned as a “replacement of the state”, its function being to manage everyday life. We cannot ignore the fact that a certain expertise in Jewish studies influences the ones who dedicate their time to Israeli studies and facilitates their endeavors. As far as Middle East studies are concerned, they provide a better knowledge of the geo-political situation in the area, with a strong impact on knowing the geopolitical framework of various Israeli issues, not only external relations and security policies, but also economic, social and domestic policies. Despite being geographically placed outside of Europe, Israeli studies are strongly connected to European studies. Born as a result of the success of a specific European political project - the Zionist project - Israel was and is deeply connected to the political and economic developments of Europe.

The Center of Israeli Studies within the National University of Political Science and Public Administration, according to its profile, is meant to train experts in the extremely complex problems faced by Israel, so that they may be employed by government bodies, businesses, non-governmental organizations and the media. To achieve this purpose, we want to develop a teaching structure, a Master Programme, and to organize regular academic meetings so as to discuss a number of issues faced by the Israeli society. In parallel to training specialists, together with other academic institutions in Romania and abroad, the Center also intends to pursue research in the field.

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