Inside, Outside - Diasporas and Modern States

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A speech given at the meeting of the Canada-Macedonia Chamber of Commerce in Toronto, Canada on December 4th, 1999

Distinguished Guests, I was born to parents of the working class in Israel, in 1961. It was a grim neighbourhood, in a polluted industrial area, a red bastion of the "socialist" labour party. The latter would have easily qualified as Bolshevik-communist anywhere else. It exerted the subtly pernicious decadently corrupt kind of all-pervasive influence that is so typical in one party states. Sure, there were a few token fringe opposition parties but Labour's dominance went uninterrupted for more than 90 years. And corruption was both rife and rampant – nepotism, cronyism, outright bribery. During the 70s, the recently appointed governor of the central bank was imprisoned and a minister committed suicide. Many more immolated themselves or ended serving long sentences in over-crowded jails. Massive scandals erupted daily. Some of them cost the country more than 10% of its GDP each (for example, the crisis of the bank shares in 1983). In the 80s, privatisation turned into an orgy of privateering, spawning a class of robber barons. Red tape is still a major problem – and a major source of employment. And then there were the wars and armed conflicts and vendettas and retributions and mines and missiles and exploding buses and the gas masks. In its 52 years of independence the country has gone through 6 major official wars and more than 10 war-sized conflicts.

Yet, despite all the above, Israel emerged as by far the most outstanding economic miracle. Its population was multiplied by 10 by surges of immigrants. During the 50s, it tripled from 650,000 (1948 – Jewish population figures only) to 2,000,000. The newcomers were all destitute, the refugees of the geopolitics of hate from both the Eastern block and from the Arab countries. The cultural, social and religious profile of the latter stood in stark contrast to that of their "hosts". Thus the seeds of long term inter-ethnic, inter-cultural, social and religious conflicts were sown, soon to blossom into full-fledged rifts. During the 90s – 800,000 Russian immigrants flooded a Jewish population of 4,500,000 souls. But these demographic upheavals did not disturb a pattern of unprecedented economic growth, which led to a GDP per capita per annum of 17,000 USD. Israel is a world leader in agriculture, armaments, information technology, research and development in various scientific fields. Yet, it is a desert country, smaller in area than Macedonia and with much fewer and lesser natural endowments. It was subjected to an Arab embargo for more than 40 consecutive years. On average it had c. 3 million inhabitants throughout its existence.

Israel's secret was the Jews in the Jewish Diaspora the world over.

From its very inception – as a budding concept in the febrile brain of Herzl – the Jewish State was considered to be the home of all Jews, wherever they are. A Law of Return granted them the right to immediately become Israeli citizens upon stepping on the country's soil. The Jewish State was considered to be an instrument of the Jewish People, a shelter, an extension, a long arm, a collaborative and symbiotic effort, an identity, an emotional apparatus, a buffer, an insurance policy, a retirement

home, a showcase, a convincing argument against all anti-Semites past and present. There was no question whatsoever regarding the implicit and explicit contractual obligations between these two parties. The Jews in the Diaspora had to disregard and ignore Israel's warts, misdeeds and disadvantages. They had to turn a public blind eye to corruption, nepotism, cronyism, the inefficient allocation of economic resources, blunders and failures. They had to support Israel financially. In return, the Jewish State had to ensure its own successful survival against all odds and to welcome all the Jews to become its citizens whenever they chose to and no matter what their previous record or history is. Hence the constant arguments about WHO is a Jew and which institution should be allowed to monopolize the endowment of this lucrative and, potentially, life saving status. Hence the bitter resentment felt in many circles toward the 200,000 or so non-Jewish immigrants, the relatives of the Jewish ones who flooded Israel's shores in the last decade.

But the consensus was and is unharmed, appearances notwithstanding. And the Jews supported Israel in numerous straightforward and inventive ways. They volunteered to fight for it. They spied for it. They donated money and built hospitals, schools, libraries, universities and municipal offices. They supported students through scholarships and young leaders through exchange programs. They managed and financed a gigantic network of educational facilities from youth summer camps to cultural exchanges. They bought the risky long-term bonds of the nascent state, which was constantly fighting for its life (and they did an excellent business in hindsight). Some of them invested money in centrally planned, periphery bound, lost economic causes – ghost factories that produced shoddy and undemanded goods. Year in and year out they poured an average of half a billion US dollars a year annually (about 200 million US dollars a year in net funds). Most of the money did not come from the stereotypical Jewish billionaires. Most of it came through a concerted effort of voluntary (though surely peer pressured) money raising among hundreds of thousands of poor Jews the world over. The Jewish people set up a horde of organizations whose aim was collection of funds and their application to the advancement of Zionist and Jewish causes. Every Jew deposited a few weekly cents into the "Blue Box" – "for the cause": to redeem land, to establish settlements, to open educational institutions, to publish a Jewish newspaper, to act against anti-Semitism, to rebrand Judaism and fight nefarious stereotypes. It was a grassroots movement directed only by the dual slogans of "No Other Choice" and "The Whole World is Against Us". Emanating from posttraumatic and paranoiac roots – it later became a groundswell of goodwill, enthusiastic co-operation and pride.

And all this time, the Jews knew. Not only the sophisticated, worldly Jewish moneymen. Not only the cosmopolitan, erudite Jewish intellectuals. But also the more typical small time tailors and shoemakers and restaurateurs and cab drivers and plumbers and sweatshop textile workers. They all knew – and it did not sway them one bit. It did not drive them away. They did not gripe and complain or abstain. They kept coming. They kept pouring money into this seemingly insatiable black hole. They kept believing. They kept waiting and they kept active. And all these long decades – they knew.

They knew that Israel was ruled by a caste of utterly corrupt politicians whose avarice equalled only their incompetence. They knew that central planning was going nowhere fast. They knew that elections were rigged, that red tape was strangling entrepreneurship and initiative, that inter ethnic tension was explosive. They knew that Israel lost its not to a demographically exploding Arab population coupled

with endless acts of terrorism. They knew that Israel's conduct was not fair, not always democratic, and often unnecessarily aggressive. They knew that tenders were won by bribes, that transparency was a mockery, that the courts were negligent and inefficient. They knew that property rights were not protected and that people were pusillanimous and greedy and petty and self-occupied (not to say narcissistic). They witnessed the waste of scarce resources, the indefinitely protracted processes, the bureaucratic delays, the free use of public funds for private ends. They watched as ministers and members of the Knesset and top law enforcement agent conspired to engage in crime and then colluded in covering it up. And they felt betrayed and agonized over all this.

Yet, they NEVER – NEVER – not even for a second, considered giving up. They NEVER – NEVER – stopped the money coming. They did not discontinue the dialogue intended to make things better, over there, the land of their so distant fathers. They always donated and invested and financed and visited and cajoled and argued and opined and hoped and dreamed.

Because this was THEIR country, as well. Because it was a partnership and the inexperienced, stray partner was given the benefit of indefinite doubt. Because they saw the opportunity – the economic opportunity, for sure – but, above all, the historical opportunity. When Israel did mature, when it became a law state, orderly, transparent, efficient, forward looking, the high tech Israel we all know – it repaid them over and over again. They all made money on their decades of patience and endurance. The rich made big money. The small guys made less. But there is no Jew today who can say that he lost money in Israel because he became financially or economically active there in the long run.

They stuck to Israel primarily because they were Jews (and, by easy extension, Israelis). And this is what being a Jew meant. And they were richly rewarded by the Justice Minister of history. Perhaps there is a lesson to be learnt here by Macedonians in the Diaspora. I, for one, am sure there is.

Thank you.

Reprinted from the book After the Rain - How the West Lost the East, by Sam Vaknin, Ph.D., 2nd Edition, Narcissus Publications Imprint, Skopje, 2003.

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Sam Vaknin is the author of Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited and After the Rain - How the West Lost the East. He served as a columnist for Central Europe Review, PopMatters, Bellaonline, and eBookWeb, a United Press International (UPI) Senior Business Correspondent, and the editor of mental health and Central East Europe categories in The Open Directory and Suite101. Until recently, he served as the Economic Advisor to the Government of Macedonia. Mr Vaknin's web site is at http://samvak.tripod.com.

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