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The new five-year term of the newly elected European Parliament has just started with a plenary session in Strasbourg and will continue with committee meetings in Brussels next week. At the same time we at the European Coalition for Israel believe we are entering a new season for our ministry. In this issue we will present a number of practical ways for you to become involved!

Diplomatic crises between Sweden and Israel demand clarification

Stockholm - For several months ECI has been expressing concern about the Swedish EU-presidency, indicating that it could mean bad news for Israel. Sadly, our predictions have come true. The Swedish EU-presidency has already been tainted by the diplomatic crisis of Sweden's governments refusing to react to an anti-Semitic article in the largest Swedish newspaper *Aftonbladet*. The article accused Israeli soldiers of stealing organs of dead Palestinians.

Some readers have asked ECI to clarify whether it is legitimate to criticize Israel. ECI does not make its own calls regarding anti-Semitism but instead follows the definitions of organizations like the Council of Europe, OSCE and European Union Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia. Those definitions of anti-Semitism include

1. Denying the Jewish people the right to self-determination, e.g. by claiming that the existence of a state of Israel is a racist endeavor;
2. Applying double standards by requiring of Israel a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation;
3. Using the symbols and images associated with classic anti-Semitism (e.g. claims of Jews killing Jesus or blood libel) to characterize Israel or Israelis;
4. Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis;
5. Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the State of Israel.

These definitions, which are congruent with traditional definitions of anti-Semitism, are the basis upon which ECI regards the demonization of Israel in parts of Sweden and other European countries as being very problematic.

ECI initiates emergency summit in the parliament in Stockholm to repair diplomatic links between Israel and Sweden

Stockholm – ECI contacted the government of Sweden directly to express our concern about the lack of reaction to the blood libels articulated in an article in *Aftonbladet*. ECI has pointed out many times before that anti-Semitism is a major problem in Sweden, among Christians and seculars alike.

Despite the massive protests from the government of Israel and Jewish communities around the world, there has been no apology or reaction from the government. Swedish State secretary Fredrik Belfrage declined an ECI initiative to call an emergency summit. "Though the initiative as such is honorable, there is no time for such an event during the EU-presidency," he explained. (When the Muhammed caricatures were printed in a Danish newspaper in 2006 however the Swedish government publicly asked journalists not to publish material which may insults people)

It is not too late for the Swedish parliament to come to the rescue. Negotiations are already underway to organize a special conference to be held during the EU-presidency to raise awareness of the problems that the non-reaction has caused and to provide a venue for the different parties to dialogue directly with one another. Even though the official position is to ignore the situation many members of the Swedish parliament have expressed their desire to help combat anti-Semitism. Please pray that this meeting will shed light on the problems that exist in Sweden and in the EU. Please also pray that the church in Sweden will distance itself from these current expressions of anti-Semitism.

New season in the European Union **This is what ECI does – and this is how you can help.**

As mentioned last month; ECI is a ministry of prayer and advocacy. (advocacy = pleading and defending the cause of another) As Israel become increasingly marginalized and under pressure we feel it is important for a Christian voice to speak to government leaders and other decision makers in Europe. This Biblical model is clearly spelled out in the Book of Esther. Esther was called to stand before Kings and Queens but it was equally important for her to have friends who would cover her in prayer.

You can get involved in a similar way. While the Lord may or may not call you to stand before governments and parliaments, it is important to keep in mind that each one of us is called to pray for those in authority and for those who are called to engage with them.

Please pray for the ministry of ECI. Please also pray for leaders in Europe to wake up to the rise of anti-Semitism and understand God's plans and purposes for Israel.

Prayer cells

We encourage you to form a small prayer cell, with two or three people, who meet and pray on a regular basis for our work and for the leaders of Europe. Many such ECI-prayer-cells already exist in Europe. We will be happy to send you regular prayer updates.

Prayer initiative 736

You may also become directly involved by praying for members of European Parliament in a very concrete way. Participants in our new "Initiative 736" commit to praying for a particular MEP from their own country.

If you adopt a MEP from your own country you will be a prayer covering for that person and will pray that he or she will become a blessing to both Europe and to Israel.

Information sharing

Each month we send out a report that describes some of our activities. Please forward these reports so that the message will reach more people. If you want more news and updates you can join us on Twitter www.twitter.com/EC4Israel or Facebook www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=12315359596 or simply check our website www.ec4i.org for regular news updates.

Conferences and ECI events

Attending an ECI event in Brussels is an excellent way to learn more about our work and to experience Brussels in real life. Here are some of our upcoming events.

January 28, 2010. Political Conference in the European Parliament

January 29-30, 2010 Church conference in Brussels: "The Church in Europe, Islam and Israel."

April 9-11, 2010 European Prayer Summit in Brussels

Please contact the office on info@ec4i.org if you want more information.

Advocacy

Our advocacy works includes of regular meetings with government representatives and parliamentarians in Brussels and in other national capitals in Europe where we meet with government representatives and parliamentarians. We are in regular contact with a wide range of parliamentarians and government officials by e-mail, telephone and personal visits to encourage, support and inform them about issues related to Israel. Along with managing these relationships we are constantly on the lookout out for opportunities to make new friends for Israel.

We also respond to crisis situations by spearheading initiatives like Internet campaigns, collecting names for petitions or organizing special events. If you want to become more involved in our advocacy initiatives please let us know.

Giving

We believe the ministry of ECI is in a crucial position for getting the Biblical message about Israel to the decision makers in Europe. By the grace of the Lord we are currently recognized by the European Commission and the European Parliament as well as by the Israeli government and the European Jewish Congress. This gives us a unique opportunity to speak out, on behalf of Christians in Europe, in EU-governmental circles where there has previously been no Christian voice for Israel. The doors are open, but our ability to make the best use of this unique opportunity is dependent upon your financial support.

ECI is a new ministry founded in the form of a coalition. This explains why we do not have a sufficient donor base. We need your help now. Please consider investing in to this ministry by becoming a regular donor or by donating an annual gift. Or, could it be that you do not have the funds to give right now but know someone who is better able to give at this time. If so, please help us by introducing ECI to this person and to other interested people.

Together, we can make a difference “for such a time as this”.

For more information on European Coalition for Israel, please visit our website www.ec4i.org
For questions/reactions contact the ECI office in Helsinki by e-mail on info@ec4i.org or by postal mail: PB 189, FI-00181 Helsinki, Finland

Would you like to support European Coalition for Israel financially? Please send your donation to the following account. If you prefer to donate by credit card, you can use Pay Pal on our website.

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