



By: *The Editorial Board*

Europe reassesses Israel – universities under pressure of responsibility



In recent weeks, European universities have moved from ethical declarations to administrative decisions.

The wave of academic boycotts of Israeli institutions is no longer merely a student protest but a set of procedures that change how international agreements are concluded, joint projects are conducted, and scientific careers are planned in Europe and beyond.

The most recent overview of this shift is **provided** by Le Monde: around thirty universities in countries such as the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, and Spain have terminated or suspended collaborations with Israeli partners, and the pressure has shifted from symbolism to measurable consequences for grants, exchanges, and the visibility of researchers.

Nearly a thousand scientists have signed a petition asking CERN to reconsider its cooperation with Israel.

This indicates that the most elite European research infrastructures are now involved, not just bilateral agreements between faculties.

At the same time, the international framework remains uneven. Reports in the British and French media indicate a rapid spread of institutional ruptures with Israeli scientific and research institutions, from South America to Europe.

However, leading university networks in the UK, France, and Germany are **rejecting** the idea of a blanket boycott.

They insist on preserving scientific freedom and individual consideration in each case.

In this context, a new divide is emerging in the international educational and research sphere: one part of the system adopts a restrictive approach towards institutions it perceives as extensions of the state and security apparatus, while the other upholds the principles of open cooperation with individual researchers, irrespective of their country of origin.

How universities are redefining cooperation

On the ground, the institutional implementation of the boycott is already visible. The University of Ghent, one of Belgium's leading state universities, has terminated cooperation with its Israeli partners, citing its obligation to **respect** its own human rights policy.

That decision set a precedent—other administrations are now introducing similar ethical filters and risk assessment systems before concluding international agreements.

The Netherlands has taken additional measures. Erasmus University in Rotterdam has **suspended** cooperation with three Israeli institutions, assessing that there is a high risk they could indirectly contribute to violations of humanitarian law.

The Delft University of Technology (TU Delft) has **implemented** a "no, unless" policy, effectively halting new partnerships while conducting additional ethical reviews on existing ones.

The University of Amsterdam has also **introduced** a requirement for formal ethical evaluation of any future cooperation. Such administrative language becomes more enduring than the protests themselves.

The pressure is no longer merely a matter of reputation but is now affecting scientific output itself

During the summer, partial interruptions of cooperation with Israeli institutions began in Italy.

Certain departments at the University of Florence have terminated their agreements with Israeli partners, indicating that decisions are now being made not only at the senate level but also within laboratories and departments.

The University of Pisa has formally **terminated** framework contracts with two Israeli universities, explaining that a blanket boycott is not being introduced, but that each collaboration is being reviewed individually.

This approach is establishing the criteria for deciding which relationships will continue and which will be terminated in the coming months.

There are also concrete data showing that the pressure is no longer merely a matter of reputation but is now affecting scientific output itself.

In September, the Science|Business portal **published** an analysis noting a visible decline in international co-authorships with Israeli researchers during 2025, particularly in collaboration with Spain and South Africa.

This trend indicates that the boycott is shifting from symbolic to real impact—knowledge flows are being redirected to other partners, and the network of cooperation is changing in a way that will not quickly return to its previous state, even if political changes occur.

Universities becoming genuine political actors

The debate in Europe is not one-sided. Some members of the professional community believe that Israeli institutions, due to their links with military and security structures, are a legitimate target of institutional pressure.

Others warn that such measures can easily become a form of punishment for individuals, including Israeli scientists, who openly criticise their own government.

Both views are present in the British public—the number of terminated collaborations is increasing, but leading scientific organisations continue to defend professional autonomy and oppose general bans.

A thousand scientists are demanding that Europe's largest research institution distance itself from its Israeli partners

The request to CERN gives this process strategic significance. Almost a thousand scientists are demanding that Europe's largest research institution distance itself from its Israeli partners.

The very fact that such an initiative has emerged in a serious public forum demonstrates how far the boycott has advanced.

Even without a formal decision, the consequences are evident—the trust on which large international partnerships depend is being depleted more rapidly than the funds from the budget.

Universities in the United Kingdom, France, and Germany are avoiding general bans on cooperation for now but are introducing stricter checks and clear criteria for so-called "dual-use" risk—the possibility that research results could also be used for military purposes. This has become the main dividing line in Europe.

The key issue is no longer whether the term "boycott" appears in regulations, but whether ethical and reputational checks will become a mandatory part of every international agreement.

All indications suggest that they will. As a result, universities are becoming genuine political actors, as human rights and the responsibility of partners become integral to decisions on cooperation.

Science does not operate in closed circles

The issue of consequences within the Israeli scientific system is also emerging. The government is attempting to mitigate these

with large scholarships and financial incentives to retain researchers and encourage the return of those working abroad.

Such measures may slow the outflow of experts, but they do not restore confidence in international partnerships.

Science does not operate in a closed circle, and any suspicion that cooperation with Israeli institutions carries reputational risk encourages European teams to seek other partners.

In the coming period, Israeli research institutions will need to regain credibility in the eyes of their former collaborators.

Collaborations are now evaluated not only by scientific value but also by the degree of risk

This change affects the very structure of university management. Collaborations are now evaluated not only by scientific value but also by the degree of risk.

Governing bodies are now meticulously screening partners, scrutinising everything from ownership ties and funding sources to potential connections with government or military programmes.

This is an additional administrative burden but also a way to protect universities from political pressures and crises that have arisen from outside in recent years. Such caution is set to become a permanent practice, regardless of the outcome of the war in Gaza.

This situation takes on added significance in the context of the United States, where universities have already become involved in political conflicts.

Disputes between Washington and leading institutions, including the Harvard **case** and current financial settlements, do not directly relate to the boycott of Israel but demonstrate that universities can no longer rely on their status as neutral spaces.

In such an environment, European administrations have increasingly limited room for error regarding reputation and public trust.

Caution will become a permanent feature

If the war in Gaza continues, the consolidation of this new situation can be expected in the coming year.

Cooperation with Israeli institutions will be maintained only where there is a clear and verifiable separation from military-security structures and where projects pass rigorous ethical checks.



Should there be political changes in Israel, some channels of cooperation may be restored, but the situation prior to 2023 will not return - The University of Ghent

The social sciences and humanities will experience the greatest decline in cooperation, as they are most exposed to reputational risks.

In the natural sciences and technical fields, partnerships will persist where civilian and military applications are clearly distinguished and where there is a public interest in continuing research.

Should there be political changes in Israel, some channels of cooperation may be restored, but the situation prior to 2023 will not return.

Caution will become a permanent feature, and renewed collaborations will be subject to strict

controls and time limits.

For European universities, a reasonable approach involves three steps: a clear separation of institutions linked to the state apparatus from individuals, who must not be subjected to collective measures; complete transparency in the verification procedure, so that decisions are defensible to both the scientific community and the public; and coordination with foundations and donors, to ensure that responsibility does not become financial pressure ultimately affecting students and young researchers.

Only in this way can the university remain true to its mission while adapting to a world in which science has become part of the political sphere.

The most lasting consequence of this process will be a change in trust. Partnerships are no longer measured solely by scientific results but also by issues that were previously secondary: the institution's position regarding human rights, its sources of funding, and whether research results could be used for purposes the university cannot justify.

The answers to these questions determine who will share laboratories, data, and authorship. This is the real effect of the boycott already visible—reshaping the network of cooperation and redefining the university's place in international relations.