# Hungarian FM: We Oppose Anti-Israel Bias in UN, EU

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Budapest is committed to combating anti-Israel bias in the United Nations and the European Union, the country’s Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto told The Jerusalem Post.

“On many occasions I feel that both in the UN and the EU that there are biased positions against Israel,” he said on Thursday.

Szijjarto spoke with the Post at the Sheraton Hotel in Tel Aviv during a trip to Israel that lasted less than day.

He was preparing for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s visit to Hungary on July 18-19. It will be the first visit to Hungary by an Israeli prime minister since Budapest restored ties with the Jewish state in 1989, the first of the former Soviet bloc countries to do so.

Hungary sees itself as strong friend to Israel, particularly within the EU, where it is one of the 28 member states.

In particularly it has advocated for a long-anticipated upgrade to bilateral Israel-EU ties.

It had been expected that the EU-Israel Association Council, which has not met since July 2012, would be convened in March to take steps to advance that process. Some diplomats have said that its delay was tied to EU frustration with Israel over settlement activity. No date has been set for a meeting.

“We are among the few countries in the EU which are heavily pushing for the convening of the Association Council,” Szijjarto said. It’s “unacceptable” and “unfair to Israel” that this has not happened, he added.

“It is in the interest of the EU as well to have a better and more pragmatic cooperation with Israel based on mutual benefits,” he said.

“If you ask me whether I think it is good that there are some countries which think the Association Council should be somehow inserted into the Middle East process, I do not think it is a good approach, because it does not help the relationship not to have the Association Council [active],” Szijjarto said.

Upgrading bilateral ties would lead to an increase in EU-Israeli economic cooperation, something that would be helpful to the EU’s economy which is losing its competitive edge, he said.

His country, Szijjarto said, has also worked with Israel behind the scenes at the UN and the EU to halt biased actions against the Jewish state. It is among the bloc of EU countries that often abstains on significant votes.

At the UN Human Rights Council, where Hungary is one of the 47 members, “we were in a continuous coordination and cooperation with your authorities,” he said.

Hungary is one of three countries that have spoken out against EU consumer guidelines to label settlement products as “not made in Israel.”

“We made it very clear that we do not apply that. We are absolutely against it. We find that it is unacceptable,” he said. “If you pose the question, does it bring us closer to a solution, [the answer is] definitely not. Then why do we do it, why do we endanger the jobs of Palestinian people?” Szijjarto asked.

But he paused when asked if he considered that he visited Israel when he was in western Jerusalem.

“I met your prime minister there,” he said, but did not directly address the issue.

Instead he said, “You know Hungary is a small country, and Hungary would never give advice to anyone how to overcome very serious difficulties and challenges. What I can tell you is the following: “We support whole heartedly and with all of our strength the Middle East peace process. We would love to see Israelis and Palestinians live in peace and progress.”

When asked if Hungary would relocate its embassy from Tel Aviv to western Jerusalem, he said that the issue was not raised in his conversation with Netanyahu.

When asked again, Szijjarto said, “In politics like sports, sentences starting with ‘if’ do not make sense.”

Throughout the rest of the interview, he spoke warmly of Hungarian-Israeli ties, explaining that he saw the two countries as “political and scientific allies.”

Hungary wants to bolster economic ties with Israel, particularity with regard to the automotive industry.

“Israel has become the leading country in the world regarding developing [self-driving vehicles], and since Hungry tries to be the same in Europe, this offers a good opportunity for cooperation,” Szijjarto said.

Water management and energy will also be on the agenda, particularly the possibility of exporting Israeli natural gas to Hungry. Upgraded ties would also include scholarships for Israeli students to study in Hungarian universities.

When Netanyahu visits Budapest, he is to attend a Visegrad Group summit along with Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland.

Many Jewish cultural festivals are hosted in Hungary. The government has rebuilt synagogues and Jewish cemeteries, Szijjarto said.

Holocaust denial is punishable by a prison sentence, he said, adding that there is zero tolerance for antisemitism.

Hungary has had a Holocaust Remembrance Day since 2001.

“The Jewish community is a very valuable and integrated part of the Hungarian society. If you come to Budapest there is a remarkable and significant renaissance of Jewish culture,” Szijjarto said.