

PRESS RELEASE

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New European Association for Israel Studies launches at London conference hosted by SOAS

The School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) hosted the inaugural meeting of the newly-formed European Association for Israel Studies (EAIS) on Sunday 18 September. The event was attended by over 100 academics from 14 countries across Europe, plus attendees from the United States and Israel.

Speakers at the meeting included:

- Raffaella Del Sarto, Pears Fellow in Israel and Mediterranean Studies at the Middle East Centre of St Antony's College, University of Oxford
- Derek Penslar, Samuel Zacks Professor of Jewish History at the University of Toronto
- Colin Shindler, Emeritus Professor and Pears Senior Research Fellow in Israel Studies at SOAS, University of London

EAIS has been created through a partnership between Pears Foundation and SOAS, the UK's leading institution for the study of the languages, cultures, politics and history of the Middle East, as part of the School's long-term commitment to strengthen its expertise in Israel Studies.

The association will promote, encourage and sponsor scholarly activity related to the study of Israel by bringing together the leading European scholars in the field. It is independent, politically neutral and completely transparent in its approach.

Yesterday's event was the first of what are hoped to be many opportunities for academics working in this area to research an academic subject that is becoming increasingly popular as an area of study.

Colin Shindler, Emeritus Professor of Israel Studies and the incoming Pears Senior Research Fellow in Israel Studies at SOAS, welcomed the creation of EAIS, saying:

"It was tremendously exciting to see all my colleagues and peers from across Europe, from Siberia to Iberia, gathered at SOAS yesterday. I believe that the creation of the EAIS marks the start of a dynamic period of development for this area of study. Israel, its role, its position within the Middle East and within the wider world, is such an important issue—one that provokes such passionate and polarised views—that its complexity demands scholarly consideration, a space where the real issues can be explored and examined intelligently. Up to now, we've had to look to the US for this level of debate and collaboration, so the formation of EAIS is extremely welcome."

Charles Keidan, Director, Pears Foundation, outlined his hopes for EAIS, saying:

"Israel Studies is a growing academic discipline in Europe and further afield with increasing demand from students and others for rigorous academic enquiry, research and teaching in this area. Our Foundation is committed to improving the level of debate and understanding around Israel and EAIS forms a hugely important step forward for that commitment."

Trevor Pears, Executive Chair of Pears Foundation, spoke at the conference, saying:

"We have been quietly but persistently championing this area of study. We have always believed that Israel/ Middle Eastern Studies should be taught in a honest, scholarly and rigorous way. And that if done so it can advance knowledge, avoid stereotyping, increase understanding of different narratives and make a real difference in educating the leaders of tomorrow. The establishing of the European Association of Israel Studies, and to have so many eminent academics here today, perhaps marks the field's coming of age in Europe."

The creation of the EAIS forms part of a wider programme of support from Pears Foundation for Israel Studies, with posts in a number of British universities. This includes the Pears Lectureship in Israel and Middle Eastern Studies at Manchester University, the outgoing Pears Fellowship in Israel and Mediterranean Studies at Oxford University, the Pears Lectureship in Israel and Middle East Studies at University of Leeds School of Politics and International Studies (POLIS) and the Pears Lectureship in Israel Studies at SOAS. For both SOAS and Pears Foundation, the formation of EAIS marks a change in the study of and research on Israel in the UK and Europe.

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Photography from the conference is available on request.

Colin Shindler from SOAS and Charles Keidan from Pears Foundation are available for interview.

For more information, please contact:

Pears Foundation: Peter Gilheany, 020 7403 2230, peter@forster.co.uk

SOAS: Johannah Flaherty, Communications Manager, 020 7898 4956, jf51@soas.ac.uk

Notes to editors

SOAS

- SOAS is the only higher education institution in the UK specialising in the study of Asia, Africa and the Near and Middle East, and is renowned for balanced regional expertise to create a middle ground for dialogue about politically volatile regions.
- SOAS uniquely combines language scholarship, disciplinary expertise and regional focus.
- SOAS has more than 5,000 students from 130+ countries, and 45% of them are from outside the UK.
- SOAS has the largest concentration of specialist staff (350+ academics) concerned with the study of Asia, Africa and the Middle East of any university in the world.
- In 2010 the Faculty of Languages and Cultures was awarded a Queen's Anniversary Prize for Higher Education. The award was made in recognition of the excellence, breadth and depth of its teaching in the languages of Africa, Asia and the Middle East. This was the second time SOAS won this prestigious accolade – the first time was in 1996 for its international distance learning programmes.

Pears Foundation

- Pears Foundation is a British family foundation rooted in Jewish values. Its work is concerned with positive identity and citizenship.
- Pears Foundation is building the capacity of Israel Studies as an academic discipline in British and continental European Universities. Pears Foundation currently supports Higher Education posts in Israel Studies at Manchester University, Leeds University and SOAS as well as providing start up funding and support to the European Association of Israel Studies.

- For further information, please see www.pearsfoundation.org.uk

EAIS

- The European Association of Israel Studies (EAIS) is an independent, international and scholarly association devoted to the academic study of Israel. It is politically neutral.
- The EAIS will be based at SOAS for an initial period of four years.
- The Executive Committee of the EAIS comprises:
 - Professor Colin Shindler, Chair, SOAS
 - Professor Rory Miller, Director of the Middle East and Mediterranean Studies Program, King's College London
 - Professor Clive Jones, Chair of Middle East Studies and International Politics, University of Leeds
 - Dr. Amnon Aran, Lecturer in International Politics of the Middle East, City University, London
 - Dr Raffaella A. Del Sarto, outgoing Pears Fellow in Israel and Mediterranean Studies OCHJS / Middle East Centre, St Antony's College University of Oxford
 - Professor Alain Dieckhoff, CERI/Sciences Po Paris.

For further information, please see <http://www.soas.ac.uk/eais>