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By Elka Looks Tags: Diaspora Jews Jewish World IDF

French businessman rebrands Israel with 'Economic Zionism'

Edouard Cukierman to Haaretz: Israel's economic improvement is crucial to strengthening the country, integrating immigrants and improving Israel's image abroad; I have known from a very young age, this is where I belong.

Edouard Cukierman is a self-proclaimed "Economic Zionist", believing that through expanding Israel's economic ties abroad, stimulating its economy and providing jobs for new immigrants from around the world Israel can truly flourish.

Cukierman moved to Israel 27 years ago from France. His mother is Israeli and his father is French, but their home was always very Zionist and involved with Israel and Israeli-European ties.

Cukierman's father, Roger, was the CEO of the Rothschild Group in France, and chairman of the Rothschild Bank in Israel. The elder Cukierman also served two terms, the maximum amount permitted, as president of the CRIF, the Council of Representatives for Jewish Institutions in France, promoting Israel and acting as a liaison for the French Jewish community to the French government.

Upon making aliyah, Cukierman went to the Technion, where he met his wife, after which he served in the army. He is still an active reservist, working with both the IDF Spokesperson's unit for EU media as well as the negotiations unit for crisis management.

Cukierman did his MBA at INSEAD in Fontainebleau, France, after which he returned to Israel and established his own investment bank, Cukierman and Co. in 1993, as well as Astra Technological Investments, one of the first venture capital firms in Israel.

For Cukierman, Jewish values, Zionist ideology and financial savvy all play key roles in his business dealings. Many of his employees are new immigrants from Russia, France, Sweden, Belgium, the U.K. and Ethiopia, many of whom have served in the IDF.

The French businessman believes that the key to strengthening Israel is through building its economy and improving its ties abroad, and he has taken it upon himself to forge ties with international markets, focusing specifically on EU economic relations.

Astra Technological Investments was the first Israeli company to go public on the European Stock Exchange, and to date there are 87 Israeli companies on the exchange.

"When I took my first Israeli company to the German stock exchange, I was told there were no non-German companies, but there has really been a growth in European interest in Israeli companies over the past 18 years," Cukierman told Haaretz, adding that today European institutions invest both directly and co-directly in Israeli companies.

It was with this economic Zionist vision that Cukierman founded the [Go4Europe Conference](#) nine years ago, an annual conference that hosts key decision makers, will host key decision makers, business sector representatives and parliamentarians from Israel and Europe to promote economic cooperation.

The conference hosted 1,300 participants last year, with 300 of them flying in to Israel from Europe especially for the conference. This year's conference, to take place on October 31 at the Hilton in Tel Aviv will focus on solidifying economic ties with Russia, whom Cukierman believes could play a significant role in Israel's political and economic development.

"We cannot forget that there are close to a million immigrants from the former USSR in Israel today, and many of them have integrated extremely successfully into the Israeli workforce – we must capitalize on this to improve economic ties with Russia," Cukierman told Haaretz. It was with this in mind that he and his partner, Yair Shamir, decided to establish a new venture fund, Catalyst3, which will provide fund Israeli companies to be launched in the Russian market.

It seems that Cukierman's brand of "Economic Zionism" has worked; Cukierman and Co. has successfully brought into Israel a total of 3.5 billion euros in investments in Israeli high tech companies over the past 18 years, and has made the most Israeli initial public offerings in Europe.

"Israel's economic improvement is crucial to strengthening the country, integrating immigrants and improving Israel's image abroad," Cukierman told Haaretz. "I have known from a very young age, this is where I belong."

