

Cukierman calls for private sector to promote high tech aliyah

By SAM SOKOL
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Ramat Gan's business district. Photo: REUTERS

The Israeli private sector can do a great deal to encourage Western immigration to the country, especially from Europe, according to French-Israeli businessman Edouard Cukierman.

The chairman of the Tel-Aviv based investment house Cukierman & Co. and the founder of Catalyst Funds, Edouard is the son of Roger Cukierman, the president of the French communal umbrella organization CRIF.

As European immigration to Israel steadily rises and public figures such as Natan Sharansky issue statements predicting the "beginning of the end of Jewish history in Europe," Cukierman believes that Israel now has an important opportunity to attract an educated and professional class that would serve to boost the local economy. Emigration from France has been attributed to several factors, including increased anti-Semitism, a stagnant European economy and high youth unemployment rates.

Recent findings by the European Union's Fundamental Rights Agency indicated that a third of Jews from several Western European countries were considering emigration due to anti-Semitism, though it was not indicated that Israel was the only destination they were considering.

According to Cukierman, European immigrants with high levels of academic and technical training could serve as an economic catalyst, in a situation similar to the boom experienced with the arrival of massive waves of post-Soviet immigration from Eastern Europe.

The Jewish Agency for Israel "does a good job for the average immigrant," but does not know how to address the needs of educated classes from affluent Western nations as well as it deals with mass aliya, Cukierman said, adding that "they have very different needs from the standard immigrant."

Citing his work with immigrant entrepreneurs through the startup incubator The Hive, operated by "Gvahim, Cukierman said that Western immigrants "are very talented people who have a huge impact on the economy and society."

The private sector, both for reasons of self-interest and Zionism, should play a bigger role in promoting emigration from Europe, he said.

Israel lacks around 5000 engineers, he said, adding that the most efficient route for local firms to attract European employees may be to hire headhunters in France and elsewhere on the Continent to search out Jews with the requisite talents who are looking for employment in Europe's stagnant economic climate.

While Cukierman admitted that Israeli firms may not always be able to match salaries and benefits offered by European companies, he said that there are many intangible benefits, and that local firms are relatively competitive.

"We need to address their special needs and the business community is very favorable" in attracting foreign talent, he said.