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## The Sebastia of higher education

By [Avirama Golan](#)

Education Minister Yuli Tamir pledged that her ministry would not fund the College of Judea and Samaria in Ariel as a university, but this was not easy for her: Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, who hastened to congratulate the college (Tamir claims he was misled), promised to fund it when he was finance minister in 2005, and 402 scientists and 12 mayors have already lauded the upgrade.

As a peace activist experienced in struggles against Gush Emunim, Tamir should be familiar with the method in use here: Ariel is not merely a college seeking to grow. It is the vanguard of a force storming the back door, obtaining legitimacy and bringing down the whole building. The Ariel college heads and their supporters are guided by the same principle as settler leaders. The act was unofficial, but the support was political, governmental and ostensibly legal.

This time, the backing came from the Judea and Samaria Council for Higher Education, which exists due to the anomaly of Israeli life in the territories.

At the beginning of the 1990s, education minister Zevulun Hammer asked the Council for Higher Education, which he headed, to approve curricula for new public colleges, including a handful in the territories. The council objected, on the basis that Israeli law does not apply to the territories.

This move was justified, but it gave rise to a typical settler solution: the establishment of the Judea and

Samaria Council for Higher Education. This body, under the aegis of the GOC Central Command, is authorized to approve curricula in the "administered" territories under a temporary arrangement that became permanent.

The heads of the Council for Higher Education may have believed at the time that a peace agreement would soon be attained and that until that time, this would be a limited temporary body. But the settlers thought differently, and rightly so. Is this not how the State of Israel was founded as an empire, with extraterritorial colonies under the mother country? Thanks to government officials who winked, or closed their eyes, as the Sasson Report put it, the Judea and Samaria Council for Higher Education came into being, an unauthorized outpost welcomed by the establishment.

The College of Judea and Samaria in Ariel, whose students come in droves from all parts of the country, is threatening to swell and become more powerful than the universities. How convenient for the college that there is a Judea and Samaria Council for Higher Education, headed by a mathematics professor from Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. The public cannot differentiate between it and the real Council for Higher Education, just as it does not understand that the Yesha Council of settlements is not a local municipal council.

How easy it was two years ago for the previous education minister, Limor Livnat, to get around the Council for Higher Education's refusal to grant the Ariel college the title of "university" (and thus enjoy increased funding). She approached the Judea and Samaria Council for Higher Education. Like the founders of Sebastia, who counted on the blindness of the left, the Judea and Samaria Council for Higher Education counted on the confusion of the

public, the disregard of the government and the weakness of academia - and approved the move.

The Council for Higher Education, headed by Tamir, must understand that giving in to the Ariel precedent will not be merely a wretched political act, but rather a real threat to the structure of higher education. It may not be too late to stop this movement, which is bringing down Israeli society, and the Judea and Samaria Council for Higher Education must be dismantled immediately.

The Council for Higher Education might also need to warn that a degree from the new "Civilian University College," the name proposed for the Ariel college, will not be legal by any academic standard. That may not stop the influx to Ariel, but if the Council for Higher Education cannot defend itself, it should at least defend the students. Either way, if the Council for Higher Education does not take a stand, it will not be able to dismantle the "University Center" in Ariel. Rather, the new center, which might win the status of a university for all intents and purposes within five years, will dismantle the Council for Higher Education, and higher education itself.

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