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Academia: an ivory tower or a lighthouse?
Lessons from the Israeli ammonia affair

Wednesday, October 25th 2017, at 11:00
Seminar Hall, Los Angeles Building
Gathering & Refreshments at 10:45
Abstract

Much has happened since the dramatic decision of Haifa Mayor Yona Yahav on January 31, 2017 to expose the Professors' Report, also known as the Keinan Report. Over 600 newspaper articles, TV and radio interviews have covered the ammonia affair, in addition to public debates and rallies of angry citizens and students. All levels of the court system, including the Magistrate Court of Haifa, the District Court and the Supreme Court, have ruled against the government position. Many organizations became involved, including 8 different government Ministries, tens of municipalities around Israel, non-profit organizations, political parties and others. The magnitude of the entire affair and its public consequences caught the political system and the establishment totally by surprise. The story, which has multiple aspects, including the legal, economic, scientific, technological, social, political and national, raises much interest also outside the State of Israel. It is reminiscent of the examples mentioned by Nassim N. Taleb in his bestseller, “The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable”. At least four academic programs of law and public policy in the higher education system have already included the affair in their curricula.

The story also poses fundamental questions to all students and faculty members:
1. Are we responsible for everything that goes on in our country?
2. Are we exempt from being involved in the State affairs?
3. Do we have any rights or obligations to intervene in State affairs?
4. Do we have the power to influence State affairs?

The lecture will outline the sequence of events from a personal perspective, analyze the keys to success, describe the synergism among different organizations and offer key lessons and consequences to other public struggles.