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## Yesh Atid

Following is Yesh Atid's "Agenda" for the 19<sup>th</sup> Knesset, which was published in English on the party's website prior to the Knesset elections of 2013. For the party's full Hebrew platform, visit its website at <http://yeshatid.org.il/>

## Our Agenda

### THE AGENDA OF YESH ATID UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF YAIR LAPID

Yesh Atid seeks to address the most pressing issues in Israel today through:

- Reforming the increasingly ineffective system of government
- Overhauling the educational system which is currently at an all-time low
- Creating a more equitable system for the enlistment of young Israelis in serving their country
- Jump starting the economy through small business assistance for the middle class
- Providing housing opportunities for IDF veterans and young couples

**The following is a brief overview of how Yesh Atid plans to address these critical issues upon its election to the 19<sup>th</sup> Knesset on January 22, 2013.**

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#### Reforming the increasingly ineffective system of government

The first flaw, which impacts all others, is the system of government and elections. We have all witnessed the government's inaction on: equality in national service; effective education reform; and subsidized affordable housing for army veterans and young couples. These are largely the result of the government's consistent yielding to the demands of narrow interest groups and sectors, while ignoring the will of the majority. However, we know that it is ultimately the flawed structure of Israel's political system which enables this shameful practice.

Let's take a moment to compare our government to those of other nations. England, Germany, Ireland, and Austria feature coalition governments composed of just two parties. Norway, Japan, Denmark and the Czech Republic have coalitions comprised of three parties. In New Zealand, Switzerland, and Sweden, that number climbs to four. **In Israel, eight parties make up the coalition, resulting in the Prime Minister catering to the demands of each coalition partner, simply remain in**

**power!** Instead of facilitating the effective governing of the country, in accordance with the will of the majority, the system gives rise to governments that pursue the interests of those minority population sub-groups with representation in the ruling coalition.

A similar comparison between the number of ministers in the Israeli government and in other countries further illustrates the problem arising from the number of smaller parties. For example, Germany, a country with 81 million citizens and the 5<sup>th</sup> largest economy in world, has 15 ministers in its government. Switzerland, similar in size to Israel with 7.5 million citizens, has a government composed of seven ministers. **Israel's current government has 35 ministers and deputy ministers, each with ministerial benefits at a cost of 111 million shekel per year.** There are ministers without portfolio and very qualified leaders like Moshe Yaalon who hold newly created and wholly unnecessary portfolios like his Ministry for Strategic Affairs. (What exactly does that ministry do that does not fall under the purview of the Defense Ministry?) The number of small parties necessary to create a coalition, coupled with the absence of a law capping the number of ministers allowed in any government, leads to this situation of outright corruption. When Defense Minister Ehud Barak was asked about the purpose of the Ministry of Strategic Affairs as part of the Marmara investigation, he replied bluntly that it is "glue for the coalition."

Finally, the instability of successive Israeli governments caused by the number of parties means that ministers can accomplish very little, if anything, during their tenure as heads of their respective ministries. **Over just the last 20 years there have been: 20 Ministers of the Interior, 16 Ministers of Tourism, 15 Ministers of Justice and Health, 14 Foreign Ministers, 13 Ministers of Finance and Social Welfare, 12 Education Ministers, 10 Ministers of Defense, and 9 Ministers of Public Security.** Consequently, there is almost never enough time for ministers to formulate and accomplish serious reforms, resulting in those programs and reforms which are undertaken being chronically short-term, piecemeal and void of any long term strategic focus.

Many civic and extra-parliamentary groups have sought to address this issue. The Megidor Committee, the Israel Democracy Institute, the Institute for Zionist Strategies, and the "Yesh Sikui" organization have all attempted to tackle this problem but no progress has been made. Existing parties have pledged to address the problem but no legislation has been passed. Yet, this issue is the most crucial one, since any meaningful attempt to ameliorate the many social problems plaguing Israel presuppose far-reaching reform in this realm. **No existing parties have addressed the issue in an effective way and most of their proposals are too complicated to generate a consensus in the Knesset.**

The following is **Yesh Atid's simple and straightforward plan** which could be enacted within the first year of its election to the Knesset. Firstly, legislate the raising of the Knesset election threshold (**the percentage of votes required for a party to enter the Knesset**) **from 2% to 6%**. This will induce smaller parties to join forces with the larger parties thereby minimizing the number of parties in the Knesset. This will lead to more stable, less corrupt, and more effective and governable governments. Secondly, **pass legislation stipulating that the party winning the most Knesset seats will be the one to form the new government**. This will prevent voters from voting for smaller parties they know will align with a specific Prime Ministerial candidate after the elections, thereby strengthening the power of the ruling party. Aside from the benefits to be accrued by reducing the number of smaller parties, this will enable the ruling party to manage the affairs of government without having to satisfy the narrow interests of the smaller parties just to maintain their loyalty to the coalition. Thirdly, legislate that **a vote of no confidence cannot topple the government without the support of 70 members of Knesset**. This will minimize the impact that small parties have on the stability of the government, thereby empowering the Prime Minister to govern according to the wishes of the majority. Finally, a law stipulating that **governments cannot exceed 18 ministers and all must have portfolios** must be adopted. This will severely reduce the current systemic corruption and create a new culture of governance, according to which ministers entrusted with significant responsibilities actually carry them out with greater integrity and accountability.

This entirely feasible plan of Yesh Atid will succeed where others have failed. Yesh Atid will remove corrupt politicians who are motivated solely by self-interest and replace them with forward thinking leaders who will serve as a model for future Israeli leadership.

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## **OVERHAULING THE FAILING EDUCATION SYSTEM**

Yesh Atid has identified **overhauling the educational system** as one of its central campaign issues. That Israel has plummeted to 41st place in the world in math and science and 37th in reading comprehension reflects the severe problems plaguing our educational system. Minor, cosmetic reforms cannot correct these deficiencies.

Yair Lapid, Chairman of Yesh Atid, has vowed that in 10 years, Israel will be restored to its rightful place among the top 10 countries in the world in education.

Success in education relates to three realms: students, teachers, and actual educational content. The first element of the Yesh Atid plan is **a renewed commitment to teachers**. This begins with **increased salaries** so we are no longer the only OCED

country in which beginning teachers' salaries are lower than the average starting salary across the workforce.

It continues with significantly improving teacher training and empowering teachers to have more flexibility in how they teach in their classrooms. **Principals and teachers must run their schools – not regional boards, and certainly not the Education Ministry.** All of the above will result in a more enthusiastic and motivated teaching corps which will no doubt unleash more innovation and creativity among our educational personnel.

The second element is **a renewed commitment to meeting the needs of every single student** in the country. This begins with funding all their educational needs, including extra tutoring and special education assistance. It includes spending at least 26 percent more on the needs of children in the periphery, in line with other OCED countries, to close the gaps between them and students in the more affluent city centers. This commitment also demands wheelchair access to all schools, legislating zero tolerance for discrimination in schools and following up with strict enforcement.

The most significant overhaul, however, relates to **the actual education itself**, and its current focus on matriculation exams. It is well documented that when the entire aim of a course is to pass the final exam, teachers teach for the test and students are rarely inspired to appreciate these subjects or internalize their larger educational significance. The unfortunate result of the 152 matriculation exam options in the current system is that **students are denied a true liberal arts education and lose out on the chance for the personal growth afforded by truly learning these subjects.**

**Finland, which leads the world in educational achievement, has just five mandatory matriculation exams. The Yesh Atid plan calls for only four:** in Hebrew, English, mathematics, and one elective. These subjects include specific informational goals, for which teaching for the tests is ideal. However, in other mandatory subjects, such as Bible, heritage, history and science, teachers will be empowered and free to teach in creative ways, as they choose. This will **expand their students' minds and truly inculcate a love for learning and a deeper appreciation of these subjects.**

As all educators and parents will agree, a large percentage of students are not interested in a classic education, even when taught in the manner described above. The fact that only 48.1% of students nationwide pass their matriculation exams proves this point. These students are not only incapable of moving on to university but they also obtain nothing else that would enable them to sustain their future families. They are forced to waste their time in a framework which is not only unproductive but actually detrimental to them. **Yesh Atid proposes that at least half of the country's schools**

**become technological, vocational schools**, geared to each sector in the same manner as schools are currently designated – secular, religious Zionist and ultra- Orthodox.

This will **enable those non-classical students to flourish** and be prepared for life with the tools necessary to earn a living with a professional certificate in hand upon graduation from high school. This will also free teachers to truly inspire the more classical students with a liberal arts education without expending their energy on students who don't want to be there and simply cannot succeed.

One other aspect of Yesh Atid's plan is particularly focused on Israel's collective future. Beyond demanding sweeping reform of the core curriculum, the plan calls for **special courses and programs geared to breaking down barriers and fostering unity**. Religious Jewish students must be exposed to the great secular leaders of the state and come to understand that the lives of secular Israelis are also guided by values. Similarly, secular Jewish students must learn more about Jewish texts and tradition, i.e. their own cultural legacy. In Yair's own words, **“A Jewish student should not be able to graduate without having had exposure to a page of the Talmud.”**

Regarding the source of funding for this overhaul, the Yesh Atid team includes financial experts who have detailed how funds are already available for these proposals and how even more money will become available through his plan. This is especially true in light of the resources saved by cutting back on matriculation exams, downsizing the Education Ministry's mammoth regional and national bureaucracy, and the divestment of institutions which do not adhere to the state's baseline standards for public education.

In addressing these three elements of public education in Israel, the Yesh Atid plan will be tackling the main obstacles to superior educational system which could otherwise be the pride of this country. It provides for relevant, life-preparing and life-altering curricula and programs while cultivating an atmosphere that will energize and empower educational personnel at all levels. The ultimate goal of course is to **produce more motivated students who will ultimately become educated and civically engaged Israeli citizens, better equipped to lead meaningful and productive lives.**

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## **CREATING A MORE EQUITABLE SYSTEM FOR THE ENLISTMENT OF YOUNG ISRAELIS IN SERVING THEIR COUNTRY**

The issue of **sharing the national responsibilities** has risen to the fore in light of the expiration of the Tal Law and the Likud-Kadima unity government's failure to develop an alternative solution. Hence, **Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has chosen to simply not deal with this critical issue**. His proposed legislation, the “Ya'alon Plan,” is a stunt which won't lead to any serious change in the very problematic status

quo. The law allows ultra-orthodox boys to defer induction into the army between the ages of 18 and 26 and requires of them only eight hours of study, five days a week during that time period. Since young Jewish men in Israel cannot find meaningful work if they haven't served, and these young men are in a system which doesn't accept those who do serve, **the current situation is such that young ultra-orthodox males are forced en masse into the yeshivot and kollelim, even if they don't want to be there.** Once a young man has reached the age of 26, and has a wife and children, he won't leave the yeshiva to do any kind of national service.

**Yesh Atid's plan for "equal service for all," not only aims to solve the problem in a systematic manner, but, in doing so, also takes into account the needs and sensibilities of the ultra-orthodox population.** In fact, ultra-orthodox were involved in formulating the plan. The Yesh Atid plan states plainly and simply: **For the next five years, open the doors for 18-year-old ultra-orthodox young men to go to work with no requirement to serve.** During those five years the National Authority for Civilian Service will identify the differing needs throughout Israeli society and arrange to address those needs by harnessing those who will enter National Service after the initial five year period. Furthermore, during those five years, a payment plan will be established for combat soldiers who serve for a full three years.

**During those five years, the army will develop programs to facilitate the service of much larger numbers of ultra-orthodox citizens to serve in the army, and national service models will be created to be specifically geared to the needs of the ultra-orthodox (and Arab) populations.** These options will include serving in hospitals and homes for the elderly, enhancing the security of neighborhoods in conjunction with the police, assisting Magen David Adom/Hatzalah/ZAKA, and providing much-needed support in educational institutions with a focus on easing the burden of those engaged in special education.

After five years, the plan which requires all to serve will go into effect. All 18 year old boys will report to IDF induction centers. **Those selected by the IDF for combat units will serve for three years and will be given special financial privileges.** All soldiers will be paid minimum wage – 4,300 NIS a month- beginning with their second year of service. **Those designated by the army for non-combat roles or referred to national service due to physical or ideological considerations will do so for two years.** A small group of 1,000 exceptionally gifted Torah scholars will be exempt from service altogether in order to be able to continue, in an uninterrupted fashion, their full time studies. Those who refuse to serve will forfeit all government funding with the exception of basic social security.

Of all the proposals put forth thus far, the Yesh Atid plan is, above and away, the most judicious and viable one because it takes into account the needs and sensibilities of the ultra-orthodox. **The moment the restriction of work without service is removed for**

**the next five years, Haredi sources estimate that as many as 50% will immediately leave yeshiva and kollel to join the workforce.** This will quickly alter perceptions within the community, belying the prevailing notion that an ultra-orthodox male cannot simultaneously work for a living and remain righteous – or continue to study for that matter. Similarly, the many myths and preconceived notions regarding the secular world will also gradually be debunked. This will eventually lay the groundwork for the embracing of national service on the part of the ultra-orthodox and contribute considerably to their meaningful integration into Israeli society, without compromising their ultra-orthodox lifestyle. **The 50% attrition from the yeshivot will also free up 1.5 billion NIS per year which can be used to pay soldiers properly and provide them with free university education upon completion of their service.**

Furthermore, during these five years, the ultra-orthodox community can be adequately prepared for the impending changes. Once the average ultra-orthodox Israeli understands that national service options will include two years of assisting in a local clinic or nursing home, or that IDF service does not mean an end to Torah study, rhetoric about the masses proudly marching to jail in defiance of the new law will cease. Eventually, they will come to recognize that not only is this plan not anti-ultra-orthodox, it is in fact entirely consistent with Torah values and tradition.

The prime minister claims that the Ya'alon Plan was informed by the notion that change must occur gradually. Yesh Atid agrees that change can only succeed in stages, but the first step for an issue as critical as equality in service has to be some degree of genuine change and not political maneuvering which yields zero change on the ground. The Yesh Atid plan will bring about that change.

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## **SMALL BUSINESS ASSISTANCE FOR THE MIDDLE CLASS**

In response to the ongoing erosion of the economic status and stability of the middle class in Israel, Yesh Atid proposes **its small business assistance program as the key to continued economic growth.**

In the words of Yesh Atid chairman Yair Lapid, **"Small businesses are the largest and fastest-growing sector in the Israeli economy. They contribute around half of the GDP, but they are an example of a collapsing Israeli middle class which nobody takes notice of...These businesses account for 55 percent of the labor force, they provide livelihoods for more families than the workers' committees (which the Labor party promotes) and the corporations (which the Likud promotes). They are spread throughout the country, they are the backbone of Israel's periphery, and they are the best way to fight unemployment and poverty and to reduce inequality."**

Yesh Atid's small business assistance program begins with the **establishment of an agency** under the auspices of the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labor **which will determine which businesses are eligible to receive direct guarantees from the state.** This will, in turn, force banks to compete with one another each other in order to attract small businesses, unlike the current situation in which businesses owners have no choice but to beg the banks for credit.

**This agency will provide small businesses with access to consultants to assist them in obtaining licenses.** The services offered by this agency will be cheaper and more efficient than those provided by existing bodies such as the MATI Small Business Development Centers. The first **face to face** meeting with consultants would cost just 50 NIS and most consultations would take place over the Internet or by phone. **All business owners who have received assistance for two years or more will be asked to volunteer as consultants** for newer small businesses established after theirs.

Yair provided the following example when he unveiled the plan: "If somebody works as a cosmetician and discovers there are no cosmetics stores in her neighborhood in Afula and that she has two friends who are looking for work, she may then propose opening a **cosmetics store.**

But today there is nobody to help them. There is nobody to provide her cheap credit, so she needs to mortgage her house; there is nobody to explain to her how to obtain a business license, and then she discovers very quickly that it will take her many months and cost her a lot of money to get past the bureaucracy, so that in the end she asks herself, 'What do I need this for?' And the moment she says this, everything stops.

The moment she says this, instead of creating another small engine of growth for the economy, instead of three independent and profitable women, what do we have? We have a salaried employee earning minimum wage and two unemployed women who report regularly to the local employment bureau.

This is exactly the difference between an economy in crisis and a growing economy."

**Yesh Atid's small business assistance program will enable more than 50% of the population to receive the support they need to pursue their business and income dreams.**

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## **PROVIDING AFFORDABLE HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES**

The State of Israel owns 93% of this country's land. As a result, it could have almost complete control over the price of housing. Among any country's **top priorities is to make sure its citizens are provided with opportunities for affordable housing** – a

priority that successive Israeli governments have consistently neglected. In today's market, a young couple must save 127 months of salary in order to purchase a new home and this is simply unacceptable.

Yesh Atid will mandate a housing plan that will provide citizens, especially young couples, with this basic right. The most important component of the Yesh Atid plan is the **construction of 150,000 rental units** in 10 central Israeli cities over the course of the next ten years. The land will be provided at no cost and will remain under government ownership. **This project will enable young couples to rent apartments at prices 35% less than the average available rental today. This will also result in a reduction the price of apartments for sale.** This project will enable the government to provide special prices and benefits for specific populations such as policemen, teachers, firemen, social workers and security personnel to enable them to live close to the locations where they serve.

The government introduced some reforms in the area of housing in the wake of the social protests in the summer of 2011. However, most citizens are unaware that Housing Minister Ariel Attias (Shas) modified the criteria for determining eligibility, favoring those with "experience in marriage" over IDF veterans and those with university degrees. Obviously, his modification of this reform was intended to benefit those married for many years, i.e. Haredi population rather than IDF veterans. **Yesh Atid will reinstate army veterans and young couples** as the primary beneficiaries of **this subsidized housing program** immediately upon entering the Knesset, thereby assisting tens of thousands of those who have served our country to actually purchase a home.