

## Politics: Kadima's dreamers

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Gil Hoffman, THE JERUSALEM POST

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The Likud's Binyamin Netanyahu, Labor's Amir Peretz and former Shinui head Yosef Lapid undoubtedly wish they had been given the same free reign that Ehud Olmert and Ariel Sharon have enjoyed in Kadima.

Sharon and Olmert put together a list of 50 Kadima Knesset candidates on their own, without having to answer to a party membership or central committee. Sharon invited candidates to join the list, and Olmert completed the process ahead of Tuesday's opening Kadima convention, which was held at the Jerusalem International Convention Center.

The goal of Kadima's founders was to create a list with a wide variety of people from different backgrounds who could all unite behind the party's agenda of defining Israel's borders and easing the gap between rich and poor. On paper, at least, they succeeded.

Kadima's list features 11 women, 11 Sephardi candidates, six former generals, six immigrants from the former Soviet Union, four Orthodox candidates, seven academics and two residents of Judea and Samaria.

There are disengagement opponents, like Tzahi Hanegbi and Ze'ev Elkin, and there is Shimon Peres. There is haredi candidate David Tal, and there are Anastassia Michaeli, who wasn't born Jewish, and Shinui founder Uriel Reichman. There is Tal, who didn't go to college, and there is Yohanan Plesner, who has a master's degree from Harvard.

Likud and Labor politicians immediately condemned Kadima's list as a "conglomeration of people who have nothing in common other than the desire to be MKs."

They predicted that the same crises and rebellions that have plagued other parties would strike Kadima and eventually deal it a death blow.

Education Minister Meir Sheerit, who heads Kadima's organizational campaign, said that creating a centrist list required establishing a minimal common ground. But he predicted that the candidates would succeed in overcoming their differences and unite behind their common goals.

"The test for us will be to work together after the election," Sheerit said. "We couldn't test people's egos in advance. There is no psychometric test for that."

Sheerit was one of the instructors in a seminar for first-time candidates at Kadima's Petah Tikva headquarters on Wednesday. He said the freshman MKs would have to get used to faction discipline, voting for bills they might not have had a chance to read and not always getting to vote as they would have liked.

"It will take a long time for them to learn how to be politicians," Sheerit said. "They need to know that if they act independently, we won't be able to get anything done."

To acquaint readers with people they might see in the next Knesset, *The Jerusalem Post* spoke with Kadima candidates Elkin, Plesner and Michaeli.

ELKIN, 34, is Orthodox and lives in the Gush Etzion community Alon Shvut. A native of the Ukraine, he served as an adviser to Jewish Agency Education Department Director-General Alan Hoffman on Jewish education for Russian speakers around the world.

Sharon's associates, who were familiar with his work in Russian-language education, came to Elkin a month and a half ago and asked him to join the list. Olmert informed him earlier this week that he was given the 17th slot, third among Kadima's newcomers after former Shin Bet chief Avi Dichter and Reichman.

Elkin supported Yisrael Ba'aliya in the past three elections and joined Likud when the two parties merged. He describes his political views as "sane right."

He was one of the leaders of the Russian-language campaign against disengagement from the Gaza Strip ahead of the Likud referendum.

"I still believe that disengagement was wrong because we withdrew to the pre-1967 border and gave land to the Arabs without getting anything in return," Elkin said. "But I think Kadima should draw Israel's borders as soon as possible, because the line we can draw now is better than it will be in 15 years. It's almost the last opportunity to draw the border before the demographic reality kicks in."

Elkin said that setting a border means saying what land Israel will keep - not only what will be given up. He said that if Hamas doesn't join the PA government, Israel can reach an agreement with Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas, but if Hamas does head the government and doesn't change its spots, Israel should draw its border unilaterally in a way that will be recognized by the world.

PLESNER, 34, served as an officer in the IDF's Sayeret Matkal unit during the first intifada and a speaker for the Israeli consulate in New England in the second. He earned a master's in public administration at Harvard with a concentration in international security and political economy, while speaking regularly on Israel's behalf on campuses and to Jewish organizations.

After graduation, Plesner served as a senior long-term strategic analyst at a Washington-based think tank, the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessment. He authored a research project on how cultural differences impact prospects for security cooperation.

From there, he moved to the Prime Minister's Office, where he worked for director-general Ilan Cohen on special projects that included reforming the public service and police and fighting violence and crime. Kadima officials approached Plesner and offered him the 32nd slot on the list.

Plesner said he wants to help Kadima's effort to bridge the gap between the religious and secular. He said his experience with Diaspora Jewry taught him to appreciate the different approaches to Judaism. When asked for his views, he quoted from the Kadima platform.

"I believe it's important for Israel to have a dominant centrist party," Plesner said. "Diplomatic steps should be taken to preserve strong Jewish majority in Israel and not to be dragged into negotiations with partners who can't deliver. The theses of the Right and the Left have failed and most of the Israeli public understands it."

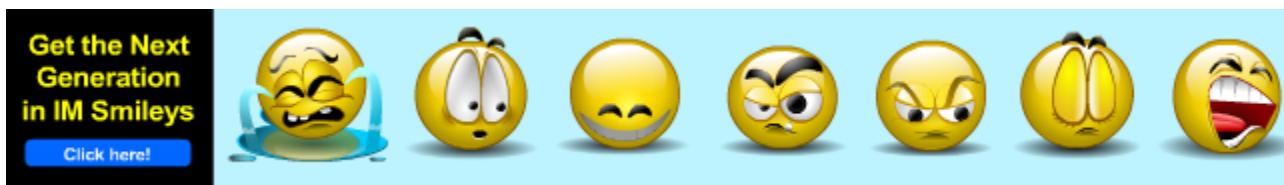
MICHAELI, 30, is a mother of six, a renowned television personality on the Israel's Russian-language Channel 9 and a former Miss St. Petersburg. She moved to Israel in 1997 with a master's degree in electrical engineering and studied business administration at Bar-Ilan University. She lives in Rishon Lezion.

Unlike Elkin and Plesner who were approached by Kadima, Michaeli made her desire to join Kadima's list known in media interviews. She said that she was always interested in politics and that as a public figure in the Russian-immigrant community, many people had asked her for assistance.

"I see running for Knesset with Kadima as an opportunity to not only be a listening ear, but to be an address to help people," Michaeli said. "I was never one to sit at home. I feel the need to work for the future of my children. My success in television can be a model to all people - not just immigrants - and give them hope that they can succeed in this country despite the bureaucracy and the challenges."

When Kadima officials offered Michaeli the 44th slot on the party's list, she initially protested, but she later decided to reject offers from other parties. She said she had clear opinions on matters of diplomacy, but that she wanted to concentrate on socioeconomic issues.

"I declared that I support Sharon's path, so I felt the need to be loyal and help the party recover the support it lost among immigrants without Sharon," Michaeli said. "We have a great team of experienced people who I am convinced can lead us to peace."



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