



BOTSCHAFT DES STAATES ISRAEL

S. E. Botschafter Jeremy Issacharoff

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Landtag Brandenburg

- Es gilt das gesprochene Wort -

Sehr geehrte Frau Landtagspräsidentin,
sehr geehrter Herr Vizepräsident des Landtags,
sehr geehrter Herr Ministerpräsident,
sehr geehrte Abgeordnete,
verehrte Gäste,

ich danke Ihnen für die Einladung, zu Ihnen zu sprechen – aus Anlass des 70. Geburtstags des Staates Israel. Der Landtag Brandenburg ist übrigens das erste Parlament in Deutschland, das mich aus diesem Anlass eingeladen hat. Es ist eine Ehre und eine Freude, heute hier zu sein.

Rather than further imposing on your patience and good will with my attempt to speak German, I think it is better for all concerned if I switch to English now.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Being Israeli Ambassador to Germany is one of the most important and sensitive diplomatic positions that Israel has around the world. The relations between our two peoples and countries have an unprecedented past – and that past has also given a unique character to the bond between Germany and Israel.

Germany and Israel established diplomatic relations in 1965. In comparison to the 53 year-long cooperation and friendship with the Federal Republic of Germany, our relations with the Land Brandenburg are still relatively young. It was not until the wall came down and Germany was unified that there was a chance to establish relations. So we still have a lot to catch up with and there still is a lot to do.

I would like to thank Ministerpräsident Dietmar Woidke for his leadership. I already had the pleasure of meeting him several times and I consider him a good friend of Israel – and also a personal friend. In four days - on April 29th - Ministerpräsident Woidke will depart on a visit to Israel with a distinguished delegation of CEOs of many companies eager to explore economic opportunities in Israel. I know that he makes this visit with a lot of good intentions and I am sure that he and his delegation will find numerous ways of expanding and strengthening our relations.

I particularly cherish the upcoming establishment of a "German-Israeli Friendship Association" here in the Landtag Brandenburg - and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Landtag that is committed to this special task in this special year, when Israel is celebrating its 70th year of independence.

I am delighted that the association will be established on the 14th of May, the date on which the State of Israel was founded according to the Gregorian calendar as a safe haven for the Jewish people. This is indeed a strong symbolic gesture! I am confident that this friendship association will provide a significant contribution to shaping the letter and spirit of the special relations between our countries and peoples.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

German-Israeli relations are built on two pillars. One is the unforgettable past, and the other is the promising future of our two countries and peoples. This dual definition distinguishes our relationship from relations Israel has with other countries.

This is also reflected in the statement of Chancellor Angela Merkel in her speech in the Knesset in 2008, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the founding of the State of Israel:

"The break with civilization that was the Shoa has no parallel."

"Every Federal Government and every Chancellor before me were obligated by Germany's special historical responsibility for Israel's security. This historical responsibility is part of the *Staatsräson* of my country. That means that the security of Israel is never negotiable for me as German Chancellor."

Today, strategic interests define the relationship and both sides share the same values and goals: democracy, freedom, peace, security and progress. But let us not forget that Israel successfully defends these values under conditions that are different from Germany: in a largely hostile environment and under a constant array of threats.

Nowadays, the breadth of German-Israeli cooperation is truly outstanding. To give you just a few examples of what we managed to achieve since 1965:

- There are more than one hundred partnerships between Israeli and German cities - and new ones are established constantly.
- All Israeli universities have cooperation agreements with universities in Germany. In fact, the University of Potsdam is very well connected and is working together with four universities in Israel in different fields: Bar-Ilan University, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Tel Aviv University, and University of Haifa.
- The youth, cultural and sports exchange brings together thousands of German and Israelis every year.
- Within the European Union Germany is Israel's most important trade partner.
- Germany is by far our biggest partner in research and development in Europe.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year we are celebrating the 70th anniversary of our independence. In fact, the Jewish people never stopped dreaming of their own national homeland in which they could take their destiny into their own hands.

In the same way we yearned for a homeland after so much suffering in the Diaspora, we continue to yearn for peace with all of our neighbors including the Palestinians and other Arab states in the region. We attach the highest value and importance to our peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan and will do all in our power to strengthen and enhance the ties with them both. Indeed, it is my belief that there is an unprecedented convergence of strategic interests between Israel and much of the Arab world and Israel will do its utmost to make that convergence stronger and hopefully more visible. I also believe that a new spirit of greater regional cooperation could be a vital component in restarting talks between Israel and the Palestinians in the pursuit of a crucially important negotiated political solution.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to expand German-Israeli relations in all fields, but mainly in the field of youth exchange. Today's youth will soon shape our bilateral relations. That's why I consider it a crucial and strategic investment in the future to bring young people from both countries even more often and even closer together.

In addition to that, young people should be taught the importance of democratic values as the basis for living together in a free, tolerant and liberal society - because democratic values are attacked again and again, also in Germany, for example by anti-Semitism. A particular challenge is the so-called "new anti-Semitism", which comes under the guise of alleged criticism of Israel. Our position is and must be: zero-tolerance to any form of anti-Semitism!

A key to combat anti-Semitism is and remains education. As Israeli Ambassador to Germany, I am trying to include encounters with the young generation in my schedule on a regular basis. For example, in January I attended the opening of a Yad Vashem exhibition about the "Righteous Among the Nations" in the Georg-Mendheim-Schule in Oranienburg, here in Brandenburg, together with former Bundespräsident Joachim Gauck. On this occasion I emphasized that the memory of the Shoa is and remains an important obligation for us all. Today it is no longer about guilt, but we and the younger generation are responsible for keeping the memory of the past alive and drawing the right conclusions for the present and the future.

There is, I believe, a vital point of consensus among almost all of us

- that to forget is a "Schande"
- that to encourage people to forget is an even greater "Schande"
- and that there can only be one alternative: to remember – and to learn from the past.

We know that we have our German partners at our side at all times. Thank you indeed for the cooperation and support. And thank you again very much, Frau Landtagspräsidentin Britta Stark, for the opportunity to mark Israel's 70th Independence Day together with you and your colleagues in the Landtag Brandenburg today.