

AvH-VR/HF

Key Note des Präsidenten der Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung, Prof. Dr. Helmut Schwarz, beim

**Festakt der DFG zum Jubiläum**

**“50 Jahre diplomatische Beziehungen Deutschland – Israel”**

am Donnerstag, dem 10. September 2015, um 16 Uhr im Leibniz-Saal der

Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften,

Berlin-Mitte, Markgrafenstraße 38 (Gendarmenmarkt)

**Redezeit 15 Minuten**

Shalom, ladies and gentlemen,

Usually, I feel rather ambivalent about invitations to speak at a political ceremony, simply because too many strings are attached to any role in a ritual. But how different is it to address you today! The growth of Israeli-German friendship is possibly the most amazing and most fortunate development I have been able to witness and to participate in in my lifetime. It is a true joy, indeed, to have the opportunity to share with you my view on this miraculous development.

Central to my own experience in this context is the concept of "bonds"; of course, not chemical bonds that bind atoms to molecules, and also not those bonds which are determined by either descent or by genetic factors, but bonds which are vital in any functioning social interactions and which Goethe described in detail in his superb novel "Die Wahlverwandtschaften" – Elective Affinities. According to him, what really matters in human relationships are genuine friendship and mutual understanding, in short: empathy, affection, and love.

When looking back on my own professional career, my “love affair” with the people of Eretz Israel started in August 1977 at a conference organized by the Weizmann Institute, this living monument to the memory of German-Jewish scientists who were victims of Nazi tyranny. My brief stay was to be followed by as many as 120 visits to Israel, resulting in a life that was characterized by passionate interaction with leading minds from various Israeli research institutions. Arriving at Ben-Gurion airport, taking a bus in Jerusalem or a Sheirut to Haifa, hiking in the Judaen desert, being exposed to the extraordinary Dead Sea landscape, getting involved in intellectual and political disputes and working jointly on scientific questions that are driven by curiosity, passion and this very Jewish thirst for knowledge: nowhere else in my quite extensive international collaborations did I ever experience this rewarding friendship that made and makes me always feel as though I were coming home.

What I have personally experienced in these four decades seems to hold true in a rather general way as well. Research and the way researchers and scholars treat each other have a seminal influence on building trust, and trust is the indispensable prerequisite and foundation for any kind of cooperation. It is out of the relationships between individual people that trust develops between institutions and finally, in the best case, even between entire states. Obviously, science occasionally acts as a diplomacy of trust, as it has always done in the work of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. Today's Alexander von Humboldt Foundation was established by the Federal Government in 1953, just a few years after the Second World War and the demise of Nazi Germany. This re-establishment witnessed the young, democratic Germany stretching out its hand in a gesture of reconciliation to the world. Scientific dialogue and exchange were seen as the means by which frontiers – and not just the proverbial walls – might be overcome. And who would have thought at the time, when Germany's and Israel's shared past was so bleak and burdened, and when the experience of war, displacement and genocide meant that even the concept of a shared future was completely uncertain – who could have predicted that we, today, would be fully justified in describing German-Israeli academic relations as a major success story and, indeed, be rather proud of it?

How did this come about?

Right back in 1958, just five years after the Humboldt Foundation was set up, and seven years before diplomatic relations were established, the first Humboldt Research Fellow arrived in Germany from Israel, a young woman, a lawyer from Jerusalem; she spent 20 months working on “International Law” in Frankfurt am Main. What a brave, courageous step, what great a gesture! A year or so ago, the former Secretary General of the Foundation, Heinrich Pfeiffer, who steered the Foundation's course between 1956 and 1994, described the mixed feelings of many fellows coming to Germany in that period, from Poland, for example, a country that Germany had invaded, ravaged and almost destroyed. So, what must coming to Germany and staying in Frankfurt have meant to that young Israeli legal scholar? My admiration for that woman, Dr Shachor-Landau, as well as for the first Minerva Fellow, Israel Pecht from Jerusalem, who joined Manfred Eigen's laboratory in Göttingen, is boundless.

And by the way, this first Israeli Humboldtian is a splendid example for a lifelong connection with the Humboldt Foundation: Next month, 57 years after her first stay in Germany, she is going to participate in a Humboldt Kolleg<sup>1</sup>! This Kolleg, a scientific conference, is taking place in Jerusalem and is organized by the Humboldt Research Awardee Professor Sara Stroumsa, together with the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, in the context of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of diplomatic relations between Germany and Israel. If you would like to know more about the story of the first Israeli

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<sup>1</sup> Frau Shachor-Landau hat bestätigt, dass sie an der feierlichen Abendveranstaltung in Jerusalem am 12.10.2015 (im Rahmen des Humboldt-Kollegs von Prof. Stroumsa) teilnehmen wird. Zudem wird ein Interview mit Frau Shachor-Landau in der nächsten Kosmos-Ausgabe veröffentlicht.

Humboldtian, you might want to read the next edition of Humboldt Kosmos, the magazine of the Humboldt Foundation; the December issue will include an interview with Dr Shachor-Landau.

She was the first, and many followed. Since 1958, a total of 173 Humboldt fellows have come to Germany from Israel, and the Foundation has also sponsored 113 award winners, including Nobel laureates like Aaron Ciechanover. They all have contributed to our research standing in the world and enriched our life enormously.

### **Encouraging greater engagement**

Ladies and gentlemen, today's event impressively highlights the diverse facets of German-Israeli academic relations, the successes and the challenges. As mentioned, my first visit to Israel goes back to 1977, and since then, I couldn't stop visiting this tiny spot on the globe, and the resulting cooperation has been life-enriching also for me and remains so to this very day.

However, this extraordinary growth of friendship and trust did not come about of its own accord in the past and cannot be taken for granted in the future either. Cooperation and solidarity are dependent on continuing efforts being made by both sides; trust has to be re-established time and again, and bonds need to be cultivated constantly and sustainably as is the need to irrigate a garden in a desert. Tackling critical questions and conducting disputes are all part of the package. There is no royal road that bypasses effort, and exclusive reference to a common past is no basis for building a future.

While the continuation and expansion of the blooming relations between Israel and Germany demonstrate how science and culture can bridge and overcome bitter experience and memories and how the relatively young history of German-Israeli diplomatic relations serves as an impressive example of how "science acts as a diplomacy of trust", more recently, we have witnessed politically and ideologically motivated efforts to boycott Israel, and particularly its academic institutions. As such acts endanger academic freedom, free speech, and human rights, all of us should unite against the destruction of these basic values. And it is needless to say, that we owe the same decisiveness to protecting the rights of others, including Palestinian inhabitants of the West Bank. Israel and Germany seek future academic, cultural and political co-operation with partners from all over the world. After all, co-operation is the first step towards building a joint future.

The words "*Anyone who doesn't believe in miracles is not a realist*" are attributed to David Ben Gurion. I should therefore like to encourage you to dream such dreams and be such realists: be motivated by what has been achieved, by the successes and the challenges, involve yourselves in securing the future of collaboration and play a role in facilitating responsible science and togetherness shaped by trust.

Vielen Dank, Thoda and Shana Tova!