

The Scientific Bridge: Fifty Years of Germany–Israel Diplomatic Relations

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Fifty years ago, out of the ashes of the Second World War, two political giants, the German Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, and the Israeli Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, initiated the establishment of diplomatic relations between Germany and Israel (Figure 1). Many Israeli citizens criticized and mistrusted the establishment of these relations and viewed it as being immoral. Nonetheless, the leaders of the two countries acted as philosophical prophets rather than politicians, and based this “special relationship” on common values and historical perspectives. It was clear that on one hand, Israelis would never forgive or forget these past evil days, whereas Germans would never accept that such dark ages return.

Jewish philosophers, writers, poets, musicians, and scientists played a central role in the German culture in contributing and sharing the cultural and scientific blooming of Germany prior to the Nazi regime. Not surprisingly, culture, science, and social programs formed the basic grounds to renew relations and build new bridges between the two countries in the aftermath of the Nazi

era. Different programs strengthening the scientific, technological, and cultural links between Germany and Israel were established. This relationship started with the primary collaboration between the Max Planck Society and the Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovot (1959) that expanded in 1964 to scientific relations with all other academic institutions in Israel, being reflected by many Minerva Centers, which were jointly funded by both countries, in the fields of physics, biology, chemistry, mathematics, computer science, environment and sustainability, social sciences, and the humanities. The Minerva Centers are focused on target subjects on the edge of modern science. They emphasize collaborative research projects between Israeli and German scientists, and particularly emphasize the exchange of young scholars of the two states. Cooperative and priority pro-

grams between the German Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the Israeli Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST) and the Israel Ministry of Trade and Commerce were established, providing further grounds to promote common projects in economy and science. Important binational scientific programs, such as the German–Israeli Foundation (GIF) and the German–Israeli Project Cooperation (DIP) highlight the intense cooperation between Germany and Israel in all scientific, technological, and cultural disciplines. These foundations support collaborative projects, exchange of students, binational meetings, and particularly encourage young scientists to work together. Very recent developments in the academic links between Israel and Germany include the Martin Buber Society Foundation, and the Frontiers Symposia of the Alexander von Hum-

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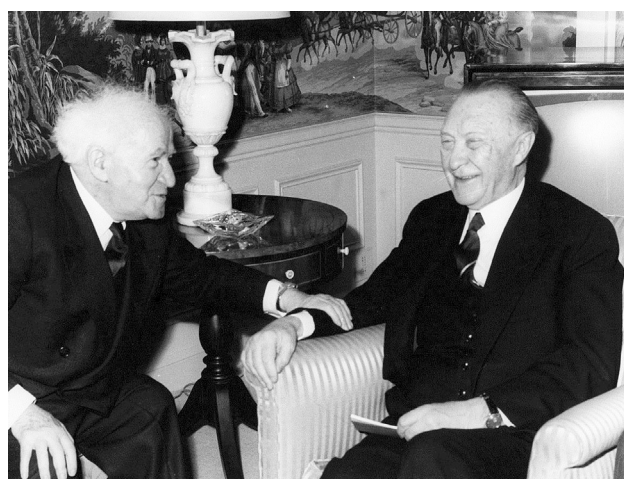


Figure 1. Historic meeting between the German Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, and the Israeli Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel, New York, 1960, laying the cornerstone for the diplomatic relations between Germany and Israel.

boldt Foundation, which are organized in cooperation with a partner country and support young scholars in the humanities, arts, and social scientific disciplines.

Intensive exchange programs reflect the time-honored scientific ties between Germany and Israel both for young scientists and established academic researchers. Many Israeli scientists and scholars have been awarded the prestigious Humboldt Research Prize and have benefited from research experience in top German research centers. Today, strong academic relations exist between the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, and different Academies in Germany, and numerous Israelis were honored to act as foreign members in German Academies including the Leopoldina, the German National Academy of Sciences. Not surprisingly, quite a few Israeli scientists were invited to serve on the editorial advisory boards of distinguished scientific journals based in Germany.

Recent activities marking fifty years of diplomatic relations between Germany and Israel include a commemorative stamp; Figure 2 and this special issue of *Angewandte Chemie*, which com-



Figure 2. Cooperative issue of a commemorative stamp by the Israel Postal Company and the Deutsche Post, marking 50 years of diplomatic relations between Germany and Israel, highlighting the Bauhaus Architectural Heritage of Tel-Aviv.

memorates the fruitful and mutually enriching long-term collaborations between Israeli and German scientists. Also, a joint Chemistry Symposium between the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities and the German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina will be held in Jerusalem (fall 2015), where the tight scientific cooperation

between the two countries will be highlighted.

Indeed, the scientific and technological links between Germany and Israel have provided exciting opportunities for the benefit of the two countries well beyond the narrow confines of scientific activities. The continuation and expansion of these thriving relations demonstrate how science and culture can bridge and overcome bitter experience and memories. The relatively young history of German–Israeli diplomatic relationship serves as a good example on how “science acts as a diplomacy of trust”. Recently, we are witnessing 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. Israel and Germany seek the future academic, cultural, and political cooperation with partners from all over the world. After all, it is cooperation that forms the first step towards building a joint future.

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