

Speech given at the ceremony on
"Science and Society as Bridges between Israel and Germany"
Marking 60 Years of Diplomatic Relations between Israel and Germany

David Harel

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Dear Prime Minister Hasselhoff, dear Ambassador Prosor, and dear, dear President Rokenbach.

Dear friends,

I stand before you today brimming with emotion and humility, representing the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities on this special evening.

In fact, I feel that I **represent a majority of Israel's citizens**, not only the academics and scientists. And, as you will see, in contrast to our truly excellent Ambassador Prosor, I am not bound by the agenda and dictates of our government, nor by the accepted demeanor and etiquette of diplomacy.

I actually contemplated giving a scientific lecture here, which might have been what the organizers were expecting. That would have been easy. Instead, last week I prepared a speech reflecting on the great friendship with Germany, with a detailed timeline of the evolution of the scientific relations between the two countries over the last 65 years. That wasn't too hard either.

However, in the last few days, given what is happening in our neck of the woods, I **decided to dump both ideas, and came to Berlin a day earlier to write a totally new speech.**

I apologize in advance for this, as there may be people here who will not be happy with what I will be saying.

I want to focus my few minutes this evening on **friendship. True, selfless, durable and lasting friendship.**

Still, it is science I should be concentrating on, though in these days and times, it is hard for an Israeli to concentrate on anything at all...

So, here goes.

Albert Einstein once said, "Science is not just a collection of laws, a catalog of unrelated facts. It is a creation of the human mind, with its freely invented ideas." Indeed, science is one of the most effective tools for building bridges between nations, connecting cultures, **healing the wounds of the past, and, of course, paving the way for a better future.**

Our friendship, that is the friendship between the people and institutions of Germany's Science and those of Israel's Science, go back to the 1959 delegation of the Max Planck Society, led by Prof. Otto Hahn, visiting the Weizmann Institute of Science, a visit widely considered to be the beginning of it all. Thus, scientific relations between Israel and Germany began even before the establishment of formal diplomatic relations; amazingly just **14 years after the end of World War II and the Holocaust.**

Given the presentations we have already heard, I can safely afford to skip the detailed timeline that ensued, which includes establishing the Minerva foundation, the bilateral ministry-level agreement on scientific and technological cooperation between the two countries, the founding of GIF, and the Germany-Israel Year of Science and Technology in 2008,

Another giant, David Ben-Gurion, famously said, "In Israel, in order to be a realist, you must believe in miracles." One could indeed claim that these scientific relations were some kind of "modern miracle", breathing new life into the connection between the two countries, which had been filled with traumatic memories and deep historical pain.

And here we stand today, in 2025, attending this wonderful event, with the **relationship between German and Israeli science being stronger than ever!**

As you all know, besides the Max Planck Foundation, we have great relationships – professional and formal, but also extremely warm and friendly – with the Minerva Foundation, the GIF Foundation, the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, the Helmholtz Association, and many more, and, of course, with your **two excellent Academies**, the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy, and tonight's generous host, the German Academy of Sciences-Leopoldina.

But I would like **to dwell on the problems we face**, since I believe that it is now “money time” for Israel, as the American phrase goes, and **we are dangerously close to losing the Israel we know and love**. Just like that!

By the way, the term we would use back home (and I was asked to say a few words tonight in Hebrew too) would be:

אנחנו בדקה ה-90, אולי אפילו בזמן פציעות, ונמצאים כפסע מאיבוד המדינה שאותה
אנו מכירים ואוהבים. ממש כך!

Please allow me now to return to a short speech I gave at the ALLEA meeting in Berlin exactly a year ago, in May 2024. I'll try to indicate when I am quoting from that speech verbatim.

So I now quote:

Two basic facts are crystal-clear:

(1) Hamas carried out the most horrifying, inhumane massacre in Southern Israel on October 7.

(2) A terrible war is being waged in the Gaza strip ever since.

Over 1200 Israelis were murdered on October 7, many suffering unthinkable atrocities in the process. As of today, 128 hostages [today the number is 58] remain in the hands of Hamas, the vast majority of which are no longer alive. Tens of thousands of Gazans have been killed in a horrible war of revenge and retaliation launched by

Israel in the aftermath of October 7, the true magnitude and ruin of which is regrettably all but absent from our local news coverage in Israel.

[All this is still true, but with the current numbers becoming even more horrifying! And far too many of these are women and children. **Just this morning I saw the unbelievable number of 18,000 children killed in Gaza!**]

I continue to quote from last year:

*But the truly devastating fact is that, for over seven months [and now I should say for over 19 months!] **no clear, reasonable and achievable goals for the war have been decided upon by our government; so that no end of it is in sight!***

*No plan for withdrawing from Gaza and stopping the continuously mounting number of casualties; no workable ideas for who should take responsibility thereafter; and no plan for returning the dying hostages. **Nothing!***

[I am continuing the quoting from last year]

*One of the depressing results of this is the fact that Israel has managed to **virtually eradicate the genuine and deep show of shock, empathy and friendship** that the world at large exhibited towards us in the immediate aftermath of October 7, including from many of you sitting here today, several of whom I know personally. [remember: this was at ALLEA, in which the main participants are heads of European academies.] **Sadly, this is fast becoming replaced by fury and rage, protests and violent riots on campuses, political isolation and many disturbing signs of painful boycotts.***

End of quotes from last year.

All of this is also still true now, and is actually becoming worse, since now the fury and the rage are fast becoming mainstream, not only on campuses.

What the current Israeli government has been doing to our **democracy** since its coming into power in late December, 2022, is bad. **Very, very bad.** Still, you may give that less attention, claiming that that is Israel's internal problem. Perhaps.

However, in stark contrast, ladies and gentlemen, **what it has been doing in Gaza for the last year and a half, after the first few weeks of a reasonably understandable retaliation for the terrible October 7 massacre, is totally and unequivocally unacceptable.**

I will not use words like genocide, starvation, ethnic cleansing etc., and I will also not get into the judicial facets of this; i.e., whether or not these actions are legal. **The facts, and the figures, and the pictures** (most of which, as I mentioned, are not reported upon properly in Israel) **speak for themselves.**

Just four days ago, **nine children, siblings, were killed by an Israeli strike from the air.** The mother, a medical doctor, received the charred bodies of her nine children; the father, an MD, badly wounded. One additional child survived, also wounded.

And a new kind of sentiment is slowly growing in Israel: we are really unable to believe that such acts are carried out **in our name, by our children and grandchildren, under guidelines issued by our elected government.** A fast-growing percentage of Israeli's are becoming shaken, shocked and totally flabbergasted. **THIS MUST STOP!**

The war in Gaza must end immediately, the remaining hostages **must** be returned (they are not going to return on their own; all too often I hear "we pray that the hostages will return"; they are not on a scouting trip – they have to **be returned**) and Israel **must** participate in the recent efforts to forge a global middle-east settlement.

The two key figures are President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu. **If they both will it to happen, it will happen.** But, Netanyahu, for obvious reasons, is still the adamant refusenik.

I have recently begun calling this war in Hebrew "מלחמת השקר", which freely translated means "**The War of Lies**", or "The War of Lying". (Yes, I know this sounds a little bit like "The Game of Thrones", but we are talking here about reality, not fiction). However, in Hebrew there is a whimsical twist to the name, since the word שקר (lie, or lies), is also the acronym of "שלום קואליציית הרשע", yielding the name "**The War for the Survival of the Evil Coalition**". Indeed, Netanyahu needs this war to keep his extremist cronies with him.

No war – no government. No war – Netanyahu's reign of power is over, and he is left with his corruption trials.

Dear friends, I am really and truly sorry for having to bring up these depressing facts here, during this festive event, but they are **directly related to the issue of science and scientific collaboration**: As you probably know, the European Union has announced that it will reassess its trade agreements with Israel. Included in this is a re-evaluation of **Israel's participation in the European Commission's Horizon Europe program**, of which the ERC grants, for example, are a valuable part.

(I was lucky to benefit from a large ERC grant in the first year of its inception, and Prof. Ruth Scherz-Shouval sitting here has received two...)

The announcement states that the EU intends to check whether Israel is in violation of Article 2 of the agreement, regarding human rights. The reassessment is thus **clearly triggered by the war in Gaza and the humanitarian crisis** that is raging there, as we speak.

This, therefore, is the connection between Gaza and science. **A continuing war in Gaza, more killing and oppression, more population transfer and more territory takeover – will lead to less science funding, less collaboration, less Israeli science, and as a result less Israeli hi-tech, less innovation, and ultimately a far, far weaker Israel.**

Getting back to friendship – this situation is **exactly** what friends are for. In the good times and in the bad.

Earlier I quoted Einstein and Ben-Gurion. Here now is another giant, John Lennon, in his lyrics for "Help!":

*And now my life has changed in oh so many ways,
My independence seems to vanish in the haze,
But every now and then I feel so insecure,
I know that I just need you, like I've never done before.*

*Help me if you can, I'm feeling down,
And I do appreciate you being 'round.*

Now, more than ever, ladies and gentlemen, far more than ever, Israeli science needs your friendship and your help, based on the premise that the pursuit of knowledge is grounded in shared universal values of academic freedom, intensive collaboration, and the freedom of thought and expression.

In ALLEA last May, I humbly, but firmly, urged the heads of our fellow European academies – and via them also universities and research institutions in their respective countries – to unequivocally reject the use of academic boycotts as a tool to deal with geopolitical issues.

Now I am asking for more: for your help in removing the threat from the European Union, with its potentially devastating consequences. However, to make this effective **one must do everything in one's power to put an end to the bloodshed in Gaza, and to get the hostages freed by the murderous Hamas.** Pure and simple.

To help with this, I suggest to clearly distinguish the **three narratives that one can hear being made against Israel**. There are still many people who confuse them with one another:

Narrative no. 1: “**Antisemitism**” – in a nutshell: the Jews must go away (to put the demand mildly).

Narrative no. 2: “**Anti-Israelism**” or “**Anti-Zionism**” – the State of Israel must go away (this I put very mildly too).

Narrative no. 3: “**Anti-what-Israel-is-doing**” – Israel's current government must go away.

Academic institutions worldwide must stand firm **against the first two of these**; manifestations of antisemitism and anti-Israel sentiments, which often masquerade as political criticism. And you, our dear German friends, are in a unique position to take the lead on this.

But at the very same time, and with equal zest, we **must all fight in favor of the third narrative**, the doubtless result of which will be **an end to the war, the hostages back, and Israel's science restored to its original status.**

Hence, as President of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, I **plead with you to help us continue to do what we do best** – front line research in all branches of the sciences and humanities, in close collaboration with our colleagues abroad – and without threats of boycotts or calls for us to disappear hovering over our heads...

As for me, this time as a private citizen, I pledge – with my many friends and colleagues in Israeli academia and outside of it – **to do everything in our power to bring about a long-due and crucial change in Israeli leadership**, and with it an end to the horrible situation in our area, leading to lasting peace and a better future for all of humankind.

Finally, since one can't quote John Lennon's lyrics without providing something from Paul McCartney too, here are a few lines from "Let it be", hinting at **the possibility – nay, the necessity! – of a full peaceful solution in the sad, sad Middle East:**

*And when the broken hearted people
living in the world agree
There will be an answer.
Let it be*

*For though they may be parted,
there is still a chance that they will see
There will be an answer.*

Let it be

I would like to **thank all those who have contributed over the years to the advancement of scientific relations between Israel and Germany.** Special thanks to our wonderful hosts today – the German National Academy of Sciences-Leopoldina and the Office of the Minister President of Saxony-Anhalt.



Thank you to all those engaged in the important work of advancing science and knowledge, and to all those working to strengthen the ties and the deep friendship between our peoples. **I see the scientific cooperation between us as living testimony to the power of science to unite, heal, and grow.**

My own deep gratitude to those of you who I have been lucky and blessed to have been able to count as my personal friends.

Sixty years of diplomatic relations, and more than sixty-five years of scientific cooperation, are just the beginning of the journey. **Let us continue together on this journey, for the sake of future generations.**

Thank you!