



Israel and Germany

**Five decades of diplomatic,
scientific and cultural relations**

From 1990 until today



25. ISRAELI PRIME MINISTER YITZHAK RABIN VISITS BERLIN

AFTER THE UNIFICATION OF GERMANY, SEPTEMBER 1992



Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin (at the center of the entrance) and Lea Rabin (to his left) visit the memorial in the former concentration camp at Oranienburg-Sachsenhausen, 16.9.1992.

Bundesarchiv, B 145 Bild-00062704 / photo: Stutterheim, Christian.

In 1992, Yitzhak Rabin visited Berlin. It was the first visit of an Israeli Prime Minister to unified Germany. Rabin's speech during his visit at the Sachsenhausen concentration camp received much attention in Germany.

"We stand here, today, all the people of freedom and culture from all over the world, and are still unable to comprehend the scope of the horror, the dimensions of the death industry which operated here at the darkest hour of history. We are here, in former East Germany, which for a generation denied its responsibility towards the Jewish people. Here they ignored the Jewish victims completely. But historical truth is stronger than all denials, and on the eve of German reunification, they took the first step in recognizing their responsibility..."

As Israelis, as Jews, as human beings, we are filled with hope. Even if present events do not show the world in its best light, we still believe in the human spirit, we still believe that people, and nations, can change, and can become different."

26. ISRAELI PRESIDENT EZER WEIZMAN ADDRESSES THE BUNDESTAG IN HEBREW, FEBRUARY 16, 1996

In January 1996, Israeli President Ezer Weizmann visited Germany. The highlight of the visit was his speech in Hebrew in front of the two German Houses, the Bundestag and the Bundesrat. The speech was written by the author Meir Shalev. Among the listeners were Germany's President (Roman Herzog), the German Chancellor (Helmut Kohl), members of the Government and ambassadors from various states. It was the first time that an Israeli president spoke before the German Parliament. In his speech Weizmann referred to the cooperation between the two countries but also to the enormous difficulty he felt while visiting Germany.

"It was not easy for me to visit the Sachsenhausen concentration camp today.

It is not easy for me to travel around this country and hear the memories and voices crying out to me from the ground."

"...Just as memory forces us to participate in each day and every event of our past, so does the virtue of hope force us to prepare for each day of our future."

In his speech in the Knesset four years later, German President Johannes Rau quoted Weizmann's speech which left a deep impression on him.



Israeli President Ezer Weizman addresses the Bundestag in Hebrew, 16.1.1996.

Bundesarchiv, B 145 Bild-00062057/ photo: Reineke, Engelbert.

26. GERMAN PRESIDENT JOHANES RAU ADDRESSES THE KNESSET IN GERMAN, FEBRUARY 16, 2000

Johanes Rau's speech was the first speech carried at the Knesset in German. President Rau addressed the Knesset on February 16, 2000 and, among other things, asked forgiveness from the Jewish people.

"I know what it means for some among you to hear the German language spoken in this High House. Your decision to invite me here fills me with gratitude. It testifies, I believe, to your determination never to suppress the past and to your courage in seeking, despite that past, to overcome the paralysis induced by its horrors. Before the people of Israel I pay humble tribute to those who were murdered, who have no graves at which I could ask their forgiveness. I ask forgiveness for what Germans have done - for myself and my generation, for the sake of our children and children's children, whose future I would like to see at the side of the children of Israel ."



President of Germany Johannes Rau addresses the Knesset in Jerusalem in German, 16.2.2000.

Government Press Office (Israel), Photo: Ohayon, Avi.

28. FIRST ISRAELI-GERMAN INTERGOVERNMENTAL CONSULTATIONS, MARCH 2008



German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert hold a joint press conference at the Prime Minister's Office in Jerusalem, 17.3.2008.

Government Press Office (Israel), Photo: Ohayon, Avi.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Israeli President Shimon Peres surrounded by children at Kibbutz Sde Boker, 16.3.2008.

Bundesarchiv, B 145 Bild-00172297/ photo: Kugler, Steffen.



Marking 60 years for the Establishment of the State of Israel, German Chancellor Dr. Angela Merkel and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert decided to hold a joint meeting between German and Israeli ministers on a regular basis. Germany was the first country with whom Israel had such a forum, and Israel was the first none European country with whom German ministers met on a regular basis. The first joint Cabinet meeting took place at Yad Vashem on March 16, 2008. In her speech to the Knesset Merkel emphasized that the Germans are committed to the memory of the Holocaust **"The Shoah fills us Germans with shame. I bow my head before the victims. I bow before the survivors and before all those who helped them so they could survive. Germany and Israel are and will always remain linked in a special way by the memory of the Shoah"** declared Merkel. Following the first meeting in 2008, four other meetings took place, the last one in 2014 when Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu hosted Chancellor Merkel.

29. CULTURAL, SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC COLLABORATIONS



The German-Israeli Future Forum

The German-Israeli Future Forum provides funding and support for Israeli and German people, working together in bilateral projects which tackle the challenges arising in both societies whilst also dealing with German-Israeli relations. Thus the Forum contributes to the shaping of these relations in a responsible manner both now and in the future. The Forum encourages lines of communication as a basis for a common future in German-Israeli relations. The foundation was established in 2007 and began to operate in 2009. The idea to establish the foundation was first expressed by the German Federal president and the Israeli president as part of the events on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the establishment of Diplomatic relations between the two countries. Photos courtesy of the German-Israeli Future Forum.

Back and Forth is an initiative of the Deutsche Film-und-Fernsehakademie Berlin (dfffb) in collaboration with the Film & T.V. Department of the Yolanda and David Katz Faculty of the Arts at Tel Aviv University. The first phase of the project took place in 2012-2013, and the second phase is currently in process. Twelve students from both universities in the two cities will create four documentary films in two mixed groups. Upon completion, the movies will compete in various film festivals.

German-Israeli Young Researchers' Exchange on Diversity (2013-2015) is an academic exchange project between the University of Hildesheim Foundation and the University of Haifa that took place between July 1, 2013 and June 30, 2015. The project entailed 16 young academics from Germany and Israel who carried out joint work on their masters' and doctoral theses on the subject of diversity in bilateral tandems. A support team accompanied the project, which also included intercultural research workshops and fieldwork research in both countries. The results of the project will be compiled in a joint brochure and research posters by the participants, which will be on public display at both universities.



Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste (ASF)

"We Germans started the Second World War and for this reason alone, more than others, became guilty of causing immeasurable suffering to humankind. Germans have in sinful revolt against the will of God exterminated millions of Jews. Those of us who survived and did not want this to happen did not do enough to prevent it... We plead that the other nations, who suffered because of us, will allow us with our hands and with our means to do something good in their countries." (Excerpt from the appeal for the foundation of "Aktion Sühnezeichen" 1958)

The story of Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste (ASF) begins in 1958, when the founder, Lothar Kreyssig asked the people and nations who suffered from the Nazis to let German volunteers help them to build up their countries, as a sign of peace and reconciliation.

In Israel the beginning was particularly difficult: the Holocaust was too close, the memory too strong and most people didn't want to get in touch with Germans. But after long and difficult negotiations, in 1961 the first volunteers came to Kibbutz Urim, to help build houses and do other physical work. In the following years, several other Kibbuzim and a school for blind children in Jerusalem agreed to receive volunteers and the number of young Germans coming to Israel began growing. In those early days, ASF did pioneering work, starting their services four years before any official diplomatic relationship between Germany and Israel was established.

With the ongoing establishment of ASF in Israel in the 1960s and 70s, the services changed from physical work in Kibbuzim to social services in hospitals, with people with disabilities, in homes for elderly people and memorial institutions. Nowadays ASF is one the most renowned voluntary organizations in Israel, with up to 25 long-term volunteers in different places all over the country (All photos courtesy of ASF).



ASF volunteers at Kibbutz Urim.



ASF volunteers meet with the painter and Holocaust survivor Yehuda Bacon, December 2014.



ASF volunteers on a trip to Jerusalem, September 2014.

Berlin Dayz and other cultural and artistic events supported by Goethe Institut in Israel

The Berlin Dayz Festival opened on October 3, 2013. The festival offered a variety of music performances, from classical to club music, interactive cultural events (such as the illumination show at the HaBima square in Tel-Aviv—in the picture on the right), screening of films by young Berlin based directors, photography exhibitions, German-Israeli Literature Conference and dance performances. The events were very successful and attracted a large number of people.

This Festival is only one of a variety of cultural events organized by the Goethe-Institut in Israel that introduce the German culture to Israel, such as "50 Years, 50 Film, 50 Directors" that took place last year. In addition, the Goethe-Institut initiates collaborations with local artists, such as the Theaterstunde theater performances that took place in Tmuna theater in 2010. The Goethe-Institut also encourages translation of German literature into Hebrew and organizes artists' and students' exchange programs.

