



**German-Israeli Scientific Collaboration: Past, Present and Future**

Keynote Speech of the President of the Max Planck Society

Professor Dr. Patrick Cramer

On the occasion of the festive act celebrating 60 years of Germany-Israeli diplomatic relations

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– Check against delivery –

It is truly inspiring to see so many young scientists from Israel and Germany gathered here today, all dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge. You carry with you dreams and ambitions for the future, and that fills me with great hope.

Your Excellency,

Dear Minister Gamiel,

Dear Minister Özdemir,

Esteemed colleagues and guests,

It is far from self-evident that researchers from our two countries today engage in intensive scientific and cultural exchange, and that they work together toward a shared future. In fact, it is quite the opposite. Consider the situation in 1948 – the year both the State of Israel and the Max Planck Society were founded. In the aftermath of the overwhelming guilt carried by Germans following the Shoah, the very idea of Israel and Germany forming friendly relations seemed unimaginable. And yet, this idea became reality. But how did it come to pass?

In this respect, I want to show you a picture. This photograph from 1959 holds great significance for me. It depicts five people in front of an airplane, their luggage in hand. It captures the first official German delegation traveling to Israel—one year before Ben-Gurion and Adenauer met in New York, and six years before diplomatic relations were established between our two countries.

But who were the individuals in this historic delegation? On the right, we see Josef Cohn, the Weizmann Institute's representative in Europe. He had to flee Germany in 1933, yet here he is, embracing



the possibility of reconciliation. Now, look at the man beside him—this is Otto Hahn, the first president of the Max Planck Society. Finally, the second person from the left. This is Wolfgang Gentner, a German nuclear physicist. In 1940, he was assigned the task of monitoring his French colleague, Frederic Joliot-Curie, with the goal of advancing an atomic bomb project. However, the two men secretly collaborated to oppose the Nazi plans.

What strikes me most is that they appear to be just normal people. In their faces, you can see both uncertainty and hope. And it is this—human beings, individuals with their personal connections—that made the new beginning possible.

Dear friends,

We will never forget that it was Israeli scientists who first extended the hand of reconciliation to us. It was the Weizmann Institute that invited German colleagues from the Max Planck Society. It was a beautiful, profoundly human gesture! And what a powerful testament to the idea that science has the extraordinary ability to build bridges! The personal relationships, the scientific spirit, and the shared language of reason made a difference. They made the delegation board the plane. It marked the beginning of a journey toward a better future.

The rest is history. Five years later, a cooperation agreement was signed between the Max Planck Society and the Weizmann Institute. The Minerva Foundation was established. To date, it has supported over 2,000 young scientists with Fellowships. And it funded 24 Minerva Centres in Israel, which have become hubs for collaborative research with German partners. Allow me to highlight the Minerva Center for Human Rights, which is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. Located at Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, it brings together leading international law scholars. I believe it will continue to play an important role in the coming years, as the entire region faces multiple challenges.

The year 1964 was just the beginning. Today, there are 290 cooperation projects between German and Israeli Universities according to the HRK. The Helmholtz Society and the German Research Council DFG are engaged in several graduate training programs together with Israeli partners. More than half of the Leibniz Institutes collaborate with Israeli institutions, and Fraunhofer also has dozens of collaborative projects. And over 80 interdisciplinary projects received funding from the German Ministry within the DIP program.

Just take the year 2023: According to the DAAD, 418 scientists from Germany stayed in Israel and 224 researchers from Israel received funding to study or work in Germany. And in the same year, 439 papers were published in cooperation between Max Planck Institutes and our Israeli partners – more



than twice the number of papers compared to 20 years before. And one last number: By now, 16 Nobel Laureates have received funding from the German-Israeli Foundation. Indeed, these numbers are impressive. But they are just numbers. Really, it is the individual people who make a difference: their ideas, their work, their friendship.

It is this friendship that guides us through the challenges of our time. After October 7, I also boarded a plane. Together with a small delegation, I traveled to Israel to assure our colleagues that they are not alone during these difficult times. Since then, we launched a program to strengthen our collaboration and we opened an office in Jerusalem.

In supporting our Israeli colleagues, we have also faced criticism. But today, I want to reaffirm: We stand with our Israeli colleagues, we oppose boycotts against them, and we will not tolerate antisemitism. Furthermore, we stand with our colleagues who have voiced criticism of the Israeli government over the recent past. Together, we urge the political leadership to secure a peaceful future—a future essential not only for our science but also for the education of the next generation and long-lasting prosperity.

There is another message I wish to convey: Israel is an integral part of the European Research Area. In times of geopolitical challenges and threats, it is more crucial than ever to strengthen Europe as a research area. We need Israel as a key component of this European Research Area—its strong research organizations and its talent. And we want Israel to remain associated with the next framework program of the EU.

Dear colleagues,

As I conclude my remarks, allow me to briefly look toward the future. At this time, the Minerva-Weizmann Program is expanding to include biology and medicine. Additionally, a special Max Planck-Weizmann postdoctoral program has been launched. These are exciting developments with the potential to foster significant new knowledge and innovation. In the spirit of our collaboration, let us also stand in solidarity with our colleagues in the United States, who are confronting serious threats and attacks on academic freedom.

May I now address all those who today hold the bonds between Israel and Germany—some of whom are here with us. Among today's speakers are two alumni of the Minerva Program, Sylvia Jonas and Noam Libeskind. People like you are the faces of German-Israeli research cooperation today. Thank you for joining today!



Dear friends,

For our shared future, I hope for a positive spirit, strength and perseverance. And despite the very difficult situation in many parts of the world, let us enjoy this very special occasion. Let us celebrate our friendship, over six decades of friendship. All the best for the future!