



THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY OF JERUSALEM

is proud to host

MENSCH FOUNDATION INTERNATIONAL AWARD CEREMONY

Honoring

JUSTICE GABRIEL BACH

Former Justice of the Supreme Court of Israel

For his outstanding contribution in raising the consciousness of the Holocaust
and its lessons worldwide

Featuring special guests

PROFESSOR STANLEY GOLDMAN

Professor of Law and Director of the Center for the Study of
Law and Genocide at Loyola University

MICHAEL MERTES

Noted author and the Israel Representative of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation

Monday, April 22, 2013 at 5:00 p.m.

Bronfman Auditorium, Sherman Administration Building
Mount Scopus Campus, Jerusalem

Reception following the ceremony

Light refreshments will be served

Please RSVP by April 18 to rachelab@savion.huji.ac.il or 02 5882805

“A True Mensch”

Michael Mertes, Director of KAS Israel, pays tribute to Gabriel Bach

Lieber Gabriel Bach,
Dear Steven Geiger,
Dear Professor Ben-Sasson,
Dear Professor Goldman;
Ladies and Gentlemen:

First of all, let me most warmly congratulate Gabriel Bach on the distinction awarded to him by the Mensch Foundation. For many years, Gabriel Bach has accompanied the work of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung's Israel office – as a lecturer, as a panelist, and as a participant in our conferences. We are proud we can count him among our friends.



On April 22, 2013, the *Mensch Foundation* honoured Gabriel Bach, former Justice of the Supreme Court and Prosecutor in the Eichmann trial 1961, with its International Award. The ceremony took place at the Senate Hall of Hebrew University. The picture shows (f.l.t.r.): Steven Geiger, President of the *Mensch Foundation*; Gabriel Bach; Prof. Stanley Goldman, Loyola University; Michael Mertes, KAS Israel; Prof. Menahem Ben-Sasson, President of Hebrew University

Foto: Barbara Rembser-Mertes

In connection with Gabriel Bach, the term *Mensch* carries a familiar tone: The German word for Human Rights, “*Menschenrechte*”, immediately comes to mind. But I am also thinking of one of the most beautiful dialogues in Mozart’s opera “The Magic Flute”. Someone introduces Tamino to Sarastro by saying “He is a Prince”, and Sarastro replies “Even more than that – he is human being!” (“Noch mehr – er ist *Mensch!*”)

In Israel and abroad, Gabriel Bach is a celebrated authority, a man who has shaped history by faithfully serving the rule of law. And yet he distinguishes himself by an extraordinary modesty and friendliness. In short, a true *Mensch!*

In January last year, I had to moderate a discussion with Gabriel Bach in the German town of Bad Sobernheim. I had invited my youngest daughter Johanna, a 21 year old law student, to join the event and to bring along some fellow students. Afterwards I asked her and her friends what their impression was, and they all told me how deeply impressed, and indeed overwhelmed, they were. One of the students, a young woman from a Turkish immigrant family, said she had to fight back her tears while listening to Gabriel Bach’s haunting account of the Eichmann trial.

This brings me to the question Steven Geiger asked me to address this evening: How does the youth of Germany feel about the Nazi past and Israel? My remarks will be a mixture of personal observations I have made as a father of four children who were born between 1980 and 1990 and of available public opinion research.

The generation I will talk about can be called the third and fourth generation. They are the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the first generation – i.e., of those Germans who were young adults at the end of World War II. I was born in 1953, which means that I belong to the second generation, those who are now elderly parents and soon-to-be grandparents. For my generation, the Nazi past has been, and remains, the central point of reference for our moral identity and our political coordinate system – a compass telling us where *not* to go.



Gabriel Bach at a conference organized by KAS Israel in Jerusalem, July 2011

Foto: KAS Israel

The Second Generation

When I was seven years old, in 1960 (the year Eichmann was captured in Argentina), my family was spending its summer holidays in Normandy where the liberation of Europe from Nazism had started on D-Day, the 6th of June 1944. One evening, I listened to my

parents and my grandmother Angelica talking about the past. I have forgotten the details of their conversation, but I can still hear the words ringing in my ears of my grandmother saying “Thank God we lost that war!”

From a child’s perspective, it wasn’t self-evident that losing was a good thing. But of course, my grandmother was right. The more I have thought about the lesson she unwittingly taught me 53 years ago, another lesson becomes even more clearer to me: *Collectively*, the Germans had not been the innocent victims of a small gang of criminal outsiders called “Nazis” – Nazism had been an inside ideology supported by millions of Germans, and every German was liable for its atrocities whether or not he or she had adhered to it *individually*.

In today’s Germany, an overwhelming majority subscribes to the proposition that the 8th of May 1945 – the day Nazi Germany surrendered – was a day of liberation for Germany itself. Compared to German public opinion in 1960, which wouldn’t have seen it that way, this change in perception certainly represents an enormous progress.

Many second generation Germans – I can speak at least on my own behalf – still feel a deep discomfort at symbols of collective pride such as the national flag, the national anthem, and national solemnities. A majority among us would not subscribe to the slogan “My country, right or wrong” because our loyalty to Germany is not an absolute value: It depends on whether or not Germany abides by the basic standards of Human Dignity and Human Rights.



April 22, 2013: Gabriel Bach gives thanks to Steven Geiger for the *Mensch Foundation Award*.

Foto: Pia Hoppenberg

However, I would criticize many of my peers for having adopted a radical pacifism which downright condemns the use of military force, irrespective of its purpose. This kind of pacifism is one of the major sources of criticism levelled against Israel in Germany and, for that matter, in Europe. I think radical pacifism is based on the misinterpretation of what “Never again!” means. It does not take into account that World War II and the Shoah were preceded by a lack of pre-emptive resistance at home and abroad to the tremendous threat that built up in Nazi Germany during the 1930’s.

Chancellor Angela Merkel, a member of the board of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, made

it crystal clear in her Knesset speech in 2008 that conveying this lesson to the public is a top challenge to the moral leadership qualities of German and European politicians: How do we react, she asked, “when surveys show that a clear majority of European respondents say that Israel is a bigger threat to the world than Iran? Do we politicians in Europe fearfully bow to public opinion ... ? No, however unpopular we may make ourselves, that is precisely what we cannot afford to do. For if we were to take that route, we would neither have understood our historical responsibility nor developed an awareness for the challenges of our time. Either of these failings would be fatal.”

Incidentally, Chancellor Merkel was born in 1954, which means that she belongs to the second generation as well.

The Third and Fourth Generation

I would now like to turn to the generation of my children and grandchildren, the third and fourth generation. For obvious reasons, their link to the first generation is fading away. Correspondingly, their emotional response to the Nazi past is different from how the second generation felt about it. This does not mean that young Germans are less prepared to confront the Nazi past – it means that the perception of how relevant it is to their own lives and moral choices are shifting.

In the beginning of last year, prior to Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 27, a renowned polling institute asked Germans¹ about whether it was time to put an end to constantly commemorating the Nazi past – *“einen Schlusstrich zu ziehen”*. In 1994, a majority of respondents – 53% – had answered “Yes”. But since the early 1990’s, that figure had gone down by a remarkable margin: In 2012, only 40% still answered “Yes”, and a majority of 56% spoke out against a *“Schlusstrich”*. Even more remarkably, almost two thirds of the 18-to-29-year old respondents – 65%, to be precise – were against a *“Schlusstrich”*.

This is the good news. The bad news is that a couple of months later², 60% of all respondents said that they felt no historical responsibility towards Israel. Roughly the same number qualified Israel as an “aggressive” country, and only 33% approved of a special German responsibility towards Israel.

What has gone wrong? In her 2008 Knesset speech, Chancellor Merkel called for “creative strategies for a future culture of remembrance,” to be developed “in cooperation with our young people in Israel and Germany”. She emphasized that places of remembrance alone,

¹ See <http://www.stern.de/politik/deutschland/stern-umfrage-zum-holocaust-gedenktage-deutsche-wollen-erinnerung-an-voelkermord-nicht-verdraengen-1777682.html>

² See <http://www.stern.de/politik/deutschland/stern-umfrage-israel-verliert-bei-den-deutschen-an-sehen-1830648.html>

important as they may be, were “not enough once memories become part of the past. Memories must constantly be recalled. Thoughts must become words, and words deeds.”

I will try to translate this into more concrete terms. To begin with, it goes without saying that Chancellor Merkel did not mean to denigrate traditional responses. For many of my peers who attended secondary school in the 1960's, German history lessons ended with the Weimar Republic. Fortunately, this has fundamentally changed since:

- I saw that my own children were given in-depth lessons about the Nazi dictatorship, World War II, and the Shoah. Their teachers took them to memorial sites and former Nazi concentration camps, and asked survivors to talk to the students.
- In civic education, as well as in our electronic media, the Nazi past is used as the prime example of what may happen if society does not vigorously fight against antisemitism and xenophobia from the outset, if Human Rights are not respected, and if citizens are not prepared to stand up for democracy.
- In the churches, age-old Christian prejudices against the Jews are being combated by the religious authorities themselves – even though I believe that much more could and should be done more than half a century after the Second Vatican Council adopted the groundbreaking Declaration “Nostra Aetate” on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions.

Despite these positive changes, why has criticism of Israel rapidly grown in recent years, and why does only a minority believe that history places a special responsibility on Germans towards Israel? I think the answer consists of many elements.

- Antizionism has become a disguise for antisemitism; this is not new, and it is not a uniquely German phenomenon.
- Germans – like other Europeans – are loosing sight of the murderous threats to which Israel is exposed; this is not new either.
- What is new, is the fact that people increasingly fail to understand that there is a deep connection between recalling the dead on one side and keeping in mind the living on the other. They see remembrance as a duty they have to discharge, but they fail to see that remembrance also creates a mutual bond between themselves and the descendants of those commemorated.

The problem is further complicated by the fact that German society is passing through momentous changes due to immigration, including from Muslim countries. Because of this, up to half of primary school students in major German cities have an immigration background. When these kids will be confronted with the Nazi past, they will perceive it as a chapter of history which is not theirs because it does not belong to their family's history.

Three years ago, the German weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* published an opinion poll³ according to which half of the German respondents of Turkish origin said that confronting

³ See <http://www.zeit.de/2010/04/Editorial-Umfrage>

the Shoah was a task for every German citizen, irrespective of his or her ethnic origin. Only 15% said it was merely a task for people of ethnic German origin. However, the opinion poll made it also clear that 53% of the German-Turkish respondents believed it was more important to be concerned with the Palestinian issue than with commemorating the Shoah; only 31% rejected that proposition.

A Future Culture of Remembrance

I think these observations give us enough hints how to specify what Chancellor Merkel called “a future culture of remembrance” in 2008:

- First of all, exchange between young Germans and young Israelis could and should be expanded – and on the German side, it should include more and more participants with an immigration background.
- Secondly, schools and agencies of civic education in Germany should raise awareness among youths that there are new manifestations of antisemitism such as denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, applying double standards by requiring of Israel a behaviour not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation, or drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis. A special focus should be put on the abuse of the Internet and social media for incitement purposes.
- Thirdly, political elites in Germany should invest more energy in explaining to the public why Israel matters to Germany more than any other country in the world. During the last couple of years, we have observed a growing gap between the pro-Israel stance of the German political elites on one side and anti-Israel sentiments within German society on the other. This is, as I already pointed out, a test for the moral leadership qualities our politicians.

I can promise you, Ladies and Gentlemen, that the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and myself will do our best to support such endeavours.

But most importantly, we need *Menschen* like Gabriel Bach who are able to bridge the gap between generations – people who are able to speak to young audiences and answer their questions in a way which opens their eyes, hearts and minds. We have every reason to be most grateful to Gabriel Bach who belongs to this rare group of people, and I would also like to congratulate the *Mensch Foundation* on their excellent choice!

Thank you.