

**Greetings to the Participants
of the JCPA/KAS Israel Conference
"Europe and Israel: A New Paradigm"
by Michael Mertes, Director of KAS Israel**

Jerusalem, March 24th, 2014

On behalf of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, I warmly welcome you to this very topical conference. I would also like to thank our tried-and-tested partner, the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, for the excellent cooperation in preparing today's event.

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung is a German political foundation dedicated to national as well as international think-tank work and dialogue. We are active around the globe with some 80 offices reaching out to more than 120 countries, and we have been working in Israel for more than 30 years.

Let me just say a couple of words about the stake my organization has in this joint conference. Most importantly, it's the legacy of Konrad Adenauer, the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany. He was also one of the founding fathers of what is now the European Union. The friendship between him and David Ben-Gurion laid the foundation for the friendship uniting Germany and Israel today. We take great pride in bearing Konrad Adenauer's name.

We also take pride in carrying on the legacy of German Chancellor Ludwig Erhard, under whose leadership (and that of Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol) diplomatic relations between Germany and Israel were established in 1965, almost 50 years ago.

Today's successor of Adenauer and Erhard, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, is a member of our foundation's board. We fully support her clear stance on Israel: Germany will never be neutral on Israel, and Israel can be sure of German support when it comes to ensuring its security. We also share Chancellor Merkel's conviction that a fair two-state solution will be an asset to Israel's security – and to the stability of the region as a whole.

The special relationship between Israel and the EU stretches back as far as the 1950s. Israel was the third country, after Greece and the United States, to request the establishment of a diplomatic mission to the then European Community. In a secret trip to Europe, Shimon Peres, then-director general of the Israeli ministry of defence, even discussed with Jean Monnet the idea of Israel joining the European Community as a member state.

When Gideon Rafael was sent to Brussels in 1957 as Israel's first ambassador to the European Community, David Ben-Gurion told him:

"Tell the Europeans that they have inherited their spiritual values from that little but enduring people which you are going to represent among them. We have not only horrible memories of the recent past in common, but also a bright future ahead of us."

In many respects, Ben-Gurion's great vision has come true. There is not a single country outside of Europe which has a deeper relationship with the European Union than Israel. This is true for almost every aspect of cooperation: political, economic, scientific, technological, cultural. Cooperation between Israel and the European Union is based on solid legal ground, the EU-Israel Association Agreement. In December last year, the EU even offered a "Special Privileged Partnership" in the event of a final peace agreement between Israelis and Palestinians. That partnership would include increased access to the European markets, closer cultural and scientific links, facilitation of trade and investments as well as promotion of business-to-business relations.

Recent public opinion research conducted by the Centre for the Study of European Politics and Society at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev shows very clearly that most Israeli citizens appreciate strong ties between the European Union and Israel.

My own organization is committed to strengthening the European-Israeli network. For example, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung supports the Bologna Training Center in Be'er Sheva. That Center plays a key role in opening Israel's higher education system to the European Higher Education Area – and vice versa.

No less than three European heads of state and government visited Israel in the first quarter of 2014 alone: the French President François Hollande, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel – along with most members of her cabinet –, and the British Prime Minister David Cameron. They all came with similar messages: We want our relationship with Israel to remain a special one. We recognize Israel's critical security needs. We reject any form of boycott against Israel.

And yet, despite all these positive and encouraging facts, Israel and the EU have been described as "uneasy neighbours". Call it the "Paradox of European-Israeli relations". Ever since the early 1970, we have been told that these relations are under strain, and that they are constantly deteriorating. At the same time, our relations have become stronger and stronger, and they are constantly improving

This conference aims to explain what has gone wrong – and to find answers how the situation can be remedied. To me, the main explanation seems to be that there is a great deal of misperception on both sides.

Take the debates on the BDS movement as an example: If you follow the debates in Israel, you can get the impression that a European boycott tsunami is currently building up. If you follow the debates in Europe, you will find that this impression does not reflect reality – it's extremely exaggerated, to say the least. Boycott groups have not managed to win the hearts and minds of many Europeans. Moreover, they do in no way represent official policies of the EU or its member states. Quite the contrary, all EU institutions and agencies, all European governments are against boycotting Israel and declare so in public.

Only recently, Israel and the EU agreed on Israel's participation in the "Horizon 2020" Programme. Israel's scientific community is greatly benefiting from this cooperation. That doesn't look like a boycott, does it? Incidentally, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, my organization, has itself been targeted by boycott groups

for its commitment to dialogue and friendship with Israel. Of course, we have not given in, and we will never do so.

I would simply ask our Israeli friends to take note of the fact that the boycott movement has been a failure. Don't fall prey to the distorted logic that "Only bad news is good news!"

I wish us all an inspiring conference which will contribute to deepening our mutual understanding.