



**Federal President Joachim Gauck
at the state banquet on the occasion of the visit by
President Reuven Rivlin of Israel
Schloss Bellevue
11 May 2015**

May I first bid you all a very warm welcome to Schloss Bellevue!

Your visit to our country marks a special anniversary. It was fifty years ago, on 12 May 1965, that Israel and the Federal Republic of Germany established diplomatic relations. I am delighted that we are celebrating this half centenary together. Let me thank you most sincerely for coming to Berlin. Your presence here is more than a gesture of trust and affinity. It is an expression of our close partnership and friendship, a friendship that has grown between our two countries year by year.

In 1965, when we were both a little bit younger, practically no one would have thought it possible for Israelis and Germans to interact as they have over the past five decades. Chaim Herzog, the first Israeli President to visit the Federal Republic of Germany, chose the right word when he said it was a miracle that the Shoah could be followed by reconciliation and understanding. This miracle was made possible by the trust that the Israelis generously placed in the Germans. We most gratefully and humbly accepted this gift, first in the West, and later, after the peaceful revolution, in the East as well.

Today our relations are unparalleled in their diversity, a vibrant web of interaction in the worlds of politics and society, in business, science and culture. The contacts are so close at political level that our Cabinets regularly meet for intergovernmental consultations. And may I say what a great pleasure it is to see so many German Government Ministers here tonight in Schloss Bellevue. Thank you.

You, Mr President, have played a special role in fostering relations between the Knesset and the German Bundestag. I myself am particularly pleased that Israelis and Germans are also getting to know each other in countless contexts unrelated to politics, and that not least here in Berlin. Young artists and students from Israel enrich this

city where German-Jewish culture once flourished, and it is wonderful to hear Hebrew on the streets. Conversely, many Germans are fascinated by Israel – something that has been true for decades. Most of those who have visited Jerusalem and the Holy Land will never forget the experience.

One thing is absolutely clear: our normal relations are to remain forever special. Israel and Germany are inextricably linked by the memory of the Shoah. We Germans are aware of our moral obligation to the Jewish people and the State of Israel, and will not let this awareness fade. But there is a further link between our two countries, on that is forged by the values for which we all stand. It is in our mutual interest to defend freedom and diversity, democracy and human rights. It is on this firm normative foundation that we wish to jointly build our future.

I know that people in Israel watch anti Semitic aggression in Europe with great concern. In Germany, too, malignant anti-Semitism was exposed last year at demonstrations against Israel's policy and military intervention in Gaza. The overwhelming majority of Germans were appalled and ashamed by the views expressed. Whatever demon this anti-Semitism feeds on, whether it comes from left wing or right wing radicals, from long term residents or immigrants, we will not tolerate it in our country. Nor will we allow fanatics to poison the political climate or spread fear.

The news reports about terrorism and humanitarian suffering in the Near and Middle East have also shocked many people in Germany. We are not indifferent when we see the homeland for all Jews around the world, the only democracy in the region, threatened by terrorism and failing states in its immediate neighbourhood. Germany will continue to stand as a friend by Israel's side. With regard to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, we in Germany remain convinced that a two state solution is the only way to bring lasting peace. We would like to see both sides reach out to each other and recognise each other's rights. We therefore regret the fact that the talks with the Palestinians have been suspended.

With regard to Iran, too, we consider negotiations to be the best way forward with a view to improving Israel's security situation. Germany and its European partners remain ready to support all initiatives that could contribute towards peaceful settlements in Israel's immediate vicinity and wider neighbourhood. In our talks today we spoke openly and amicably and at some length about these two issues, on which our opinions are not entirely the same. I am extraordinarily grateful, Mr President, for this openness and amity, also in such situations.

The innumerable events being held in this anniversary year are a testament to how deeply rooted Israeli-German relations have become

in our societies. I would like to thank the many people who actively foster the friendship between our countries, and, in many cases, have done so for years or decades. Many of you are here tonight. You are all continuing the work started by David Ben Gurion and Konrad Adenauer after the war and the Shoah. Let us keep the spirit of the founding fathers alive, and carry the essence and achievements of the past fifty years into the future.

In this spirit, ladies and gentlemen, let me propose the following toast: To the health of President Rivlin and his spouse, to the friendship between Israel and Germany, and to a shared future in peace and freedom. Le Chaim!