



BUNDESPRÄSIDENTIALAMT

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**Federal President Joachim Gauck
at a luncheon with the Presidia of the Knesset and
the German Bundestag
at Schloss Bellevue
on 3 December 2015**

Excellencies,

President of the Knesset,

Distinguished friends of the German-Israeli Friendship,

Welcome to Schloss Bellevue, which has already witnessed many an amicable meeting between Israeli and German Presidents and politicians. This year we are looking back on 50 years of diplomatic relations between our two countries. But the first contacts were made much earlier. It would not have been possible to establish diplomatic relations, as it were the foundation on which we stand today, if the groundwork had not already been laid in the years before 1965. On both sides it was courageous and level-headed politicians who were involved.

Back then the key issue was that of reparations. On the German side, it was the Social Democrat Carlo Schmid who had raised the issue and stubbornly pursued the matter through the relevant Bundestag committees. Federal Chancellor Konrad Adenauer ultimately won a parliamentary vote on material compensation for the unparalleled crimes against German and European Jews committed by Germans under Nazi rule, but only by a slim majority. On the Israeli side it was Nahum Goldmann, then President of the Jewish Claims Conference, who had the no less difficult job of persuading the Knesset to enter into negotiations. Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion was likewise a staunch advocate of communication.

If you look at the genesis of the Luxembourg Agreement today, you cannot but regard it as a wonderful example of successful parliamentary work. Carlo Schmid said at the time that it was of course not a matter of settling debts. No material reparations could ever make up for Germany's wrongs. And yet every step towards the conclusion of

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this Agreement was vital. Without this preparatory work, we would not be here today.

We know that our relations will always retain their special character. The fact that they have ripened into a friendship over the past 50 years is often called a miracle. And that it is. But as David Ben-Gurion said, "anyone who does not believe in miracles is not a realist." The exchange between our parliaments has further reinforced the foundations of this friendship. Both parliaments are committed to the same values – to freedom, democracy and human rights. Because we share this common ground, we can cope with differences of opinion and argue about our positions. We've had such arguments in the past, for example about the two-state solution and about Israeli settlements. Where could these controversies be debated better than in parliamentary chambers and between friends?

I cannot imagine any better platform for deepening our relations than regular exchange between parliamentarians. I am grateful that the Knesset and the Bundestag have chosen to continue along this path. For like David Ben-Gurion and Konrad Adenauer before us, we want to shape the future whilst being mindful of the past. I think we have managed to do that for the past 50 years. I most heartily hope that we will also manage it in the future.