



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
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**Federal Department of Economic Affairs,
Education and Research**

125th Anniversary Gala Event

Basel, 29.08.2022 - Address by Mr Guy Parmelin, Federal Councillor Head of the Federal Department of Economic Affairs Education and Research (EAER) On the occasion of "125th Anniversary of the first Zionist congress"

Mister President - First Lady,

Dear Minister,

Dear President of the Government of Basel,

Dear Members of the Government of Basel,

Dear Members of the Israeli and Swiss Parliament,

Dear Presidents of the Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities, and the World Zionist Organisation,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Switzerland has a long Jewish history dating back to Roman times, so spanning centuries. We say this with pride, but our common history is tarnished with dark chapters that make us ashamed: In the Middle Ages, entire Jewish communities were eradicated in Switzerland too, and the Jews were only afforded the same rights as Christian citizens far too late.

At the end of the 19th century, political movements fomented hatred against the Jews, making it a central element of their programmes.

In Germany, racial anti-Semitism grew stronger, and the Dreyfus Affair in France demonstrated that Jewish emancipation was in no way complete. Bloody pogroms took place in Eastern Europe. Many Jewish Swiss are the descendants of migrants who fled this murderous wave of hatred against the Jews.

Against this background, Theodor Herzl came to the sobering conclusion that Jewish emancipation would remain unfulfilled and that anti-Semitism would never disappear.

That is the historical context in which we find ourselves when we speak of 29 August 1897: political and social exclusion, and the need to protect the Jewish people from persecution and extermination are at the origins of the Zionist Congress, which took place here in Basel a hundred and twenty-five years ago, and which we are celebrating today.

Israel is now seventy-five years young. In this short time, despite the most adverse circumstances, despite external threats, the country has become an important member of the international community. Bilateral relations between Switzerland and Israel are excellent.

We enjoy close cooperation in the areas of culture, business and science.

In one respect, Israel and Switzerland are very similar; we both invest above average in education, in creating knowledge, in creating something new - for us and for the world.

As a government minister, whose portfolio also includes innovation, Israel impresses above all as a start-up nation. Herzl's vision, formulated here a hundred and twenty five years ago, is a reality today: the self-determination of the Jewish people has today become a self-determined Jewish state.

As a member of the federal government, it is important for me at this point to also address the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. In the Swiss government's view, only a negotiated two-state solution can bring about a just and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

We friends of the State of Israel can assert the right of the Palestinians to self-determination without taking the path of Jewish self-determination out of context, without reinterpreting the first Zionist Congress of Basel, without delegitimizing 'Zionism' and thus the State of Israel.

It is our task to recognise where criticism is justified and where it is misused in an anti-Semitic way.

As a representative of the federal government, I can assure you that we are fully committed to the fight against anti-Semitism. In doing so, we are protecting our Swiss values, we are protecting what makes Switzerland Swiss: our diversity. Jewish citizens have always shaped and enriched Switzerland. So when we say that Jewish life has existed in Switzerland for centuries, this is also an obligation:

We know why the Zionist Congress took place 125 years ago. The memory is a warning to us all.

We never want to lose our Jewish community, because otherwise a part of us would be lost. We would want to show Theodor Herzl that today Jewish emancipation in Switzerland is complete and that tolerance exists.

Switzerland is also a Jewish Switzerland! The Zionist Congress is part of Switzerland's history.

On that note, I would like to congratulate you (and us) on this anniversary - on this historic day.

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