



**Keynote speech by Corina Eichenberger-Walther, President of the EAI,
at the Founding Ceremony of the EAI, Sunday, 10th May 2015, in Berlin**

Dear Ambassador Shir-On

Dear Colleagues from the Bundestag

Dear delegates

Dear guests

Dear representatives from the Medias

Dear Volker Beck. Thank you very much for your friendly welcoming words. Thanks to you, we can hold our founding ceremony in this beautiful hall. We all really appreciate this kind gesture.

Furthermore, the "Max Doehleman Jazz Trio" will enhance the ceremony. Max Doehleman on the piano, Martin Fonfara on the drums, and Christian Schantz on the bass, deserve our applause.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Now, I would like to thank you for the confidence that you placed in me this morning by electing me the President of the European Alliance for Israel. I will do everything I can to justify this nomination.

I'm looking forward to the further cooperation with Claudia Korenke, Mihail Ionescu, Charles Meyer, Conrad Myrland, Wolfgang Paul and Giovanni Matteo Quer from the Board, and to the support that Lukas Blum will provide us with.

With the founding of the Alliance, we are entering new territory. But it is not a step into the unknown. We have an assignment, and its name is Israel. And we have defined goals that we want to achieve step by step. Since Vienna, we have had the opportunity to get to know each

other for over a year, and we have taken four joint actions for the benefit of Israel during this time.

The stepping into this new territory has been successful and convincing. The vigorous and "audible" debate in Brussels has not only lead to results, it also testified to the high culture of debate. I thank you all for having contributed to this founding process in such an amiable, friendly and gracious way.

Dear friends

In my country, there is an awareness around the fact that the federal state only works, if its cantons are strong and have autonomy and independence. This is how I will lead the Alliance. Not as an umbrella organisation, which issues directives or interferes in the affairs of the sub-associations. Instead, my goal is that we will find a stronger voice for Israel, build more muscle in the lobbying for Israel and that we can demonstrate and develop partnership activities to the benefit of Israel and all associations.

We can start confidently: the Alliance unites more than 20,000 friends of Israel. A large majority are non-Jewish men and women. Among them are several hundred national parliamentarians. We are well positioned and our profile is clearly different from the other pro-Israel organizations.

The idea of establishing the Alliance was created in June 2012, here in Berlin. For many years, the Boards of the three German-speaking friendship associations have held annual meetings for an exchange of experience and opinions. In 2012, the participants were concerned about the increasingly tense atmosphere between Europe and Israel as well as the fact that many states declared their will to unilaterally recognize Palestine as a state, which would make Israel more and more isolated.

It was time to take a stand. They people in Israel had to be given the feeling that they have many friends in Europe. This solidarity should not only come from Switzerland, Germany and Austria, but also from all friendship associations in Europe. The idea of the Alliance was born.

The idea was inspired by the fact that 40 years ago the Sochnut (Jewish Agency) made it its business every year to invite the European friendship associations to a meeting. As participants report, these conferences distinguished themselves particularly with the presence of high-profile guests from Israel. Each time, at least one member of the Cabinet of Israel was present. Ministers of Commerce, Foreign Affairs or Defence sat down at the table with the European friends of Israel. As I was told, the Ministers did not hold speeches, but wanted to know what they had done well and what they had not done so well. About 20 years ago, the Sochnut declared the "end of the exercise" without giving any reasons.

Ladies and Gentlemen

I know that bringing back the past is a difficult endeavour. It therefore is irrelevant, if there are now Israeli politicians who are willing to sometimes listen to friends - to listen to how Israel is perceived in Europe and to hear what Europeans don't understand about Israel or which events are detrimental to the image of the country.

Yes, I wish for such annual meetings with high-ranking Israeli personalities to happen again. At such meetings, they would encounter friends from many European countries who are themselves willing to listen to them when they describe the trials and tribulations of Israel with Europe. They could then explain, plain and simply, why they have taken the decisions they have. They could say bluntly what they expect from Europe and where they are hoping for our support.

In September last year, I had a conversation with the President of the international Committee of the Red Cross. The relationship between Israel and the Committee is generally considered, to put it mildly, not that unencumbered. However, I was amazed to hear that he thought of it as very good. He said that the relationship was very good because the Red Cross and Israel agreed in disagreeing on fundamental issues. The analogy is unmistakable. Also Europe and Israel agree in disagreeing on basic questions of international law, such as the settlements or the status of Jerusalem.

The Alliance will probably not change the solidity of these positions of the EU much. All the more, the Alliance should always emphasize and remind people of the areas in which Europe and Israel agree, the common interests that exist, and the historically rooted obligation of Europe towards Israel.

Some examples are: The common roots in Western culture, the cornerstones of democratic forms of government, the principles of a free society and the rule of law. All of this connects Israel with Europe and vice versa. And it is what we must emphasize again and again. It is the image of the free and democratic Israel, the image, we must hold against those who defame Israel as apartheid and a war criminal state.

I would also like to stress the following: Israel and Europe are a community of values. European Jews have had a significant impact on the development of the state-, social- and cultural-policy of Europe and Israel. They helped to shape the life in Europe until they were deprived of their rights, displaced and destroyed. First in Germany and then in other European countries which were conquered by Germany. Even before that, they had often been marginalised, discriminated and persecuted in European countries. Also in my country.

Theodor Herzl's vision was largely implemented by European Jews that could escape destruction by fleeing to Palestine or, as of 1945, by immigrating as survivors into the mandated territory of Britain. I keep asking myself: how did these people manage to find the strength to create Israel in the spirit of European civilization, knowing that it was this civilization that allowed one of the most terrible crimes in the history of mankind to be committed.

That brings me back to what I said this morning. Israel celebrates its 67th anniversary this year. Despite diplomatic relations with Egypt and Jordan, Israel is not welcome in the Middle East. Israel is strong, but as threatened as ever. Iran, Hisbollah, Hamas, and however the terrorist groups may be called - they want Israel and the Jews to disappear from the region. Let's not delude ourselves. The battle cry "Throw the Jews into the sea" has not lost any of its credibility in the light of the gruesome beheadings of Egyptian Copts on the Libyan Sea's beach through the IS.

I repeat. The Middle Eastern war has arrived in Europe. The attack by Islamists against cartoonists in Paris and Copenhagen was directed at the values of the European civilization. The murder of Jews by the same offenders was also an attack on Israel.

Friends, Colleagues, Guests

Our mission is called Israel. We have the program and the will to do it. The Alliance needs to also show the Jewish men and women in Europe that they are not alone. That there are many people who stand in solidarity with them and want to live with them here in Europe. We don't want them to leave Europe out of fear. When Auschwitz was liberated 70 years ago, two words spread across the world: "Never again". Therefore, Europe is responsible for Israel and the Jewish fellow citizens living here. Should our governments no longer be aware of this responsibility, and it actually looks like they are forgetting about it, then we must remind them stubbornly. This is why we are here.

In this context, the establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and Germany 50 years ago is an historic event. Precursors were David Ben Gurion and Konrad Adenauer, who met for the first time in 1960 on neutral terrain at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York, that means 5 years before taking up official relations.

I am very pleased that my colleague, Matthias Schmidt, a Member of the German Bundestag, will recall these 50 years of a special relationship for us today. He is a Member of the Home Affairs Committee of the Parliament as well as a Member of the German Israeli Association in Berlin-Potsdam. Thank you so much for your willingness to hold this important speech. It was Reinhold Robbe's idea to perform the founding of the Alliance here in Berlin in the year of the anniversary. A good idea, indeed.

It is a glory, joy and honor for us to welcome Deputy General Director Ambassador Aviv Shir-On. Aviv Shir-On is responsible for the relations between his country and Europe in the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I thank him very much that he has agreed to assess and analyse these relationships from an Israeli point of view. I am especially grateful for his personal guidance and support of our project.

Ladies and Gentlemen

I want to thank you all for having come to Berlin. You hereby express that the founding of the Alliance is important to you. Thank you for your loyalty to Israel. Let's get to work.

Thank you for your attention.