

Fostering German-Israeli Bilateral Relations for Future Generations

Vertretung
Jerusalem



Acknowledging Germany's complex history, we believe in our responsibility of ensuring ongoing relations between future generations of Germans and Israelis. Positive and shared topics with a common denominator can play a central role and will enable all to learn and benefit from each other.

CHALLENGES

Unsurprisingly, German-Israeli relations are multilayered. The past is a key element in mutual understanding between the two peoples. As Germans, we believe that today, three or four generations after the Holocaust, it is our responsibility to foster a German-Israeli relationship that acknowledges the past while building a common future. There is an essential need for face-to-face encounters and professional sharing of knowledge which will both lead to relations built on trust and connection. Without these fundamentals of mutual understanding, future generations in both countries will be fueled with misinformation, prejudice, and alienation. To address these issues academically, in 2021 research was initiated and carried out in cooperation with the Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF) and the European Fo-

rum of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem. According to its results, the affinity for Europe in general (and Germany in particular), within the Jewish segment, seems dependent on the level of one's religiosity. As Jewish religiousness increases, the attitude towards Europe (and Germany in particular), becomes more negative. Regarding attitudes of Germans towards Israelis, the fault-lines tend to depend on age group, gender, whether respondents come from the eastern or western parts of the country, and whether the respondents have a personal history of migration. These results support our notion that face-to-face encounters, meeting „real“ people from the other country and focusing on heterogeneous societies are key solutions.

APPROACHES

Together with our Israeli and German partners, we work to improve communication and collaboration between the nations. Fostering partnerships and exchange projects between agents of change – teachers and young professionals – are of utmost importance as they carry our message of cooperation and understanding. Teachers are like engines for the educational system, they are the conduit through which knowledge, skills, and experience are passing. They play a crucial role in shaping the personality of their students and enable them to be leaders of development and prosperity in their communities, and to address future challenges. In one of our projects, Israeli and German high school teachers visit each other's classrooms for mutual learning, establishing a teachers' network, ex-



Establishing an academic base of knowledge.
Picture by Henning Schacht



Teachers delegation in Germany.

changing thoughts and ideas, and honing educational expertise. During the program, we experience eye-opening discussions with experts in the educational field, pointing out similarities and differences in the education systems, cultural perspectives, and historical legacies. Having this background in mind, HSF started an exchange program for German and Israeli students of Journalism in 2016. With our partners Deutsche Journalistenschule in Munich and the Dan Department of Communication at Tel Aviv University, we established a joint program for future journalists. Students from both countries are introduced to various journalistic approaches and positions, as well as being exposed to social, economic, and cultural aspects of each society. The students are teamed up in groups composed of students from both countries, and they produce their own journalistic documentation.



Israeli-German journalism students in action.

IMPACT

The results of these projects are convincing. There are dramatic differences in mutual perceptions when comparing them before and after participating in German-Israeli exchange programs. That is a clear sign that personal encounters have tremendous influence on positive perception and on establishing a deeper understanding of complex realities, contrary to stereotypes and misconceptions.

Our main focus is on building dialogical and professional connections between German and Israeli teachers in order to have a vivid network around challenging issues of our two countries.

Prof. Arie Kizel, Vice Dean for Teaching in the Faculty of Education, Haifa University

In HSF, we put critical emphasis on measuring and evaluation of our effort. Looking back at the work of the past few years, the significant impact of these programs in the personal lives and attitudes of the participants can be observed. Our monitoring reports indicate ripple effects of these experiences in their work as change agents: teachers, journalists, academics, and other young professionals who participated tend to show a much more complex, nuanced and vibrant understanding of reality. They teach, communicate and pass on their positive experiences about the people and faces behind the statistics or headlines. We take pride in building this bridge between individuals and nations, and in creating collaborations, relationships, and people-to-people encounters.

These are the seeds to help us produce a fruitful educational, economic, political, and social future together. ■

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