Speech by Federal Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel at the 11th annual conference of the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) in Tel Aviv

2018-01-31

Excellencies,

Ambassadors,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Thank you for this invitation. I am very happy to be here.

It is a privilege to speak at a conference on strategic security here in Tel Aviv. I have great admiration for the culture of strategic discussion you have developed here in Israel. Of course, I know that this is a matter of necessity for your country. That it has always been - even a matter of life and death in light of your country’s position and the politics of the Middle East.

This understanding is shared by the Israeli public and reflected in public discourse. It is clearly part of the success story of the 70 years since the foundation of the State of Israel. And let me tell you: I believe that we in Germany have much to learn in this regard!

And we better learn fast. Why is this so? Even if many of my countrymen and -women still ignore this, for me as German Foreign Minister there is no doubt: the world has become a much less comfortable place - also for us Germans.

Let’s be honest, we have had a relatively good deal in the past. We were able to rely on the strong transatlantic relationship. Cooperation with the United States and the commitment to

NATO

remain fundamental for German foreign and security policy also today.

But we have to acknowledge the fact that the priorities of the USA are shifting. This development started before Trump: the US is turning towards Asia and looking more inwards. It is less willing to shoulder the responsibility - and the costs - of the international liberal order. We regret this - but this doesn’t change the fact: We have to react and adjust.

At the same time other major powers are becoming more assertive: Russia and China especially. All around the globe China is filling the void left by other actors. Also in your region, the Middle East, we see how space that is vacated by one power is quickly filled by another. Russia has become one of the key players in Syria.

The Syrian war is clearly a tragedy in a league of its own. But in general, instability has become almost a permanent feature in some parts of the world. The consequences are serious and pose a substantial challenge - also for us Europeans.

We have to deal with humanitarian crises, the pressures of refugees and migration and an increasing threat posed by terrorists - something we Europeans had been relatively spared from in the past.

Finally, we see how many of the liberal values we, Germans and Israelis, share - “Western” values – are under attack.

It is sad but true: these values - democracy, human rights, rule of law – are no longer the uncontested global norm. They need our protection. And protecting them also means that we have to live up to these values ourselves. This brings me to Europe.

Europe is challenged and must live up this challenge. I have been pleading for the

EU

to begin with a definition of its common interests as a starting point for developing a more strategic approach to world affairs.

Together with France, together with Emmanuel Macron, we need to work to make Europe fit for purpose in this new and challenging world: we need to look after our citizens and offer them protection in a globalized world, but Europe also needs to project power on to the international stage to be able to deliver on its original task of ensuring peace and prosperity.

It is ironic that at this moment when we need “Europe” more than ever, it is not in good shape. I am not only talking about the division between North and South, which is mainly economic in nature. Compromises will have to be found.

I worry much more about the disagreements between Western Europeans and some Eastern Europeans.

They worry me for two reasons: they threaten the cohesion of the European Union. And, second, in terms of substance, many of these attitudes and recent initiatives violate norms and convictions at the heart of the European project.

So this is not only about geopolitics but also about “Weltanschauung”. Addressing these internal divisions within the

EU

is key for any new government in Berlin. And let me assure you: we will find ways to solve these issues. And we will protect our values.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I spoke much about the challenges we face in Europe and I could say more about this. It’s obvious, however, that your country faces tough security challenges.

I have mentioned Syria. We see how this continuing instability poses a serious risk for Israel.

We share your concern about Hezbollah and other extremist forces, many supported by Iran.

Iran has profited immensely from the wars and chaos in the Middle East. This is a reason to worry.

At the same time this is also why we continue to be so convinced of the value of the JCPoA in preventing Iran from getting the nuclear bomb. Yes, it addresses only one issue of concern. But this issue – the danger emanating from nuclear capability - is a fundamental one with regard to the security of Israel and the whole region.

Having said this, we need to think about ways to address the other concerns about Iran’s activities in the region and about the role Europe can play here.

Moreover, we need to stabilize Iraq after the defeat of Da’esh – for example, by helping with demining and the establishment of effective governance structures.

Germany also supports Lebanon and Jordan, who have welcomed many refugees but are struggling under this strain. I think that both Germany and Israel share a strong interest in the stability of these countries.

On top of this, I observe an interesting process of a gradual reconfiguration of power going on in this region. It is evolving below the surface layer of acute crises and wars: what do I mean? Well, from the outside it looks like Israel and some of the big Sunni Arab states are coming together, united in their worries about Iran.

I think that such a development brings with it a great promise and new risks. I speak also of risk because I am convinced that relationships based only on a shared enemy will remain fragile.

In fact this also applies to the United States. I spoke of the void left in many places by this apparent American retreat.

Now you might argue that the opposite is true with respect to your situation. With regard to the Palestinians and the Iran question the Americans are taking your side more clearly than ever before. But is this really only a good thing?

When I think of the likely consequences, I think this is more ambivalent: American diplomacy has long succeeded in maintaining the position of an arbiter in crucial questions –also in the Middle East, despite all closeness to your country. Great achievements like the peace with Egypt would not have been thinkable otherwise. Can the Americans still play such a role if they take sides so openly? Will others try to step into their shoes?

And even closer to home, you have the unanswered question of how Israelis and Palestinians will live together in the future. From my perspective, this question challenges both Israel's security and its values.

Some may say this is not the most pressing challenge because they believe the so-called status quo can be managed or even sustained.

But as a friend of Israel and as the foreign minister of a country with a special commitment to your country's security, I am sincerely worried about Israel's mid- to long-term options. We are supposed to talk about strategy at this conference. So what exactly is Israel´s strategy in this conflict?

Some members of Israel´s cabinet are explicitly against the two-state solution. But the two-state solution has always been the foundation of our engagement for Israeli-Palestinian peace and for the large amount of funding that Germany and Europe make available in support of the situation on the ground.

And as we are talking among friends, let me add: these - at best mixed - signals do not go unnoticed in Europe, where there is clearly growing frustration with Israel´s actions. Also in Germany, and frankly inside my own party, young people feel increasingly less inclined to accept what they deem an unfair treatment of the Palestinians. And it is increasingly difficult for people like me to explain to them the reasons why our support for Israel must persist.

As a friend and close ally, we need to know if Israel is not supporting a negotiated solution to this conflict anymore.

Of course, I can understand the frustration that lies at the core of the criticism: it is hard to believe in two states living side by side in peace, security and mutual recognition when violence and incitement sow hatred and when the building of settlements - quite literally- reduces space for negotiations.

25 years after Oslo, Palestinian and Israeli leaders are still unable to say to each other: “You belong here.”

And believe me: I raise this regret also with the Palestinians. I have done so just before coming here, when I met with Mahmud Abbas in Ramallah.

And yet we must not talk only about our frustrations. We must also look to the future.

So I ask those who oppose a Palestinian state: how do you want Israel’s future to look like?

Are you prepared to pay the price of perpetual occupation and conflict – a price that will continue to grow if there is no hope for self-determination on the Palestinian side?

Are you willing to bear the consequences of fully fledged annexation – a one-state reality of unequal rights?

Or are you ready to accept a single democratic state between the sea and the river?

I admit that I am worried by these questions and especially by the lack of convincing answers so far. Until I have heard any, I believe that the path to security and peace can only be found in two states.

And now the good news: Germany is looking forward to the day when it will be able to move its Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem.

But let me add: in two states with Jerusalem as their capital. There is no shortcut here. Both parties have legitimate aspirations with regard to Jerusalem, and a solution can only be found in negotiations.

We believe this move must come in support of the implementation of a negotiated two-state solution based on the 67 line. Until then we will follow international law regarding the status of the occupied territories.

At the same time, we will always speak out when anyone tries to deny what is undeniable: the essential and historic connection of Jerusalem to the Jewish people and the State of Israel.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honored to be invited as keynote speaker today: a German foreign minister at a conference on Israeli security! For me this encapsulates what we have achieved, what we are grateful for, and what we want to treasure.

Last weekend – on Saturday, January 27th - we remembered the liberation of Auschwitz: also in Berlin, where I – the son of a National Socialist - sat on a panel with the son of Holocaust

survivors. Today I am here with you in Israel. For this fact alone I am incredibly thankful.

There can be no doubt: in recognition of our historic responsibility this will always be a special and precious bond for my country.

My country also has also a special responsibility in fighting against anti-Semitism. It is very sad but there is no denying: we have not yet won this fight in Germany. But we are determined to win it. Please be assured: my government will not tolerate anti-Semitism - of any form. Never again.

I was humbled by a speech your Ambassador to Berlin, Jeremy Issacharoff gave on Monday when we inaugurated an exhibition about diplomats recognized as Righteous among Nations. We cannot change history, he said, but history can change us. He spoke about transforming the burden of history into a unique bond.

If I say this as a German, it can sound wrong. But let me assure you: we do not want to leave history behind and we will always face our historic responsibility. Still, it fills me with joy that the relationship between our two countries has flourished over the decades.

This relationship is vibrant: it brings together entrepreneurs, scientists and artists. For the first time, Israeli and German fighter jets have trained together in the air above the Negev. We also have a Jewish community in Germany again and it is growing.

In short, it is a gift that Germans and Israelis look not only to the past but also to the future. And that they do so together.

Thank you.

Overview "Newsroom"

Source : https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/gabriel-inss-1426618