Goethe University and Tel Aviv University plan joint centre

Tel Aviv University and Goethe University want to work together even more closely in the future. A letter of intent was signed this morning in the framework of a high-profile Zoom conference, with the aim of establishing a joint research centre for religious studies and inter-religious dynamics.

FRANKFURT. A strategic partnership has already existed between the two universities since 1984, and the two cities have even been twinned since 1980. Tel Aviv University and Goethe University now want to intensify relations even further – and establish the first German-Israeli research institute. Scholars from both universities, above all in the fields of history and religious studies, have worked together regularly for many years – especially the Martin Buber Professorship at the Faculty of Protestant Theology maintains close ties with Israel. There is extensive networking between the newly founded Buber-Rosenzweig Institute for Modern and Contemporary Jewish Intellectual and Cultural History at Goethe University and the Centre for Religious and Inter-Religious Studies at Tel Aviv University in the framework of joint workshops and conferences.

The new centre will concentrate on interdisciplinary research in religious and inter-religious studies, with a focus on Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Apart from Protestant and Catholic theology, religious studies, Jewish studies and Islamic studies, other disciplines will be involved, including history, philosophy, philosophy of science and political science. Research topics are conceivable in the following areas: multicultural societies, religious conflicts, migration, fundamentalism and inter-religious dialogue. For the next 42 months, Goethe University will finance the new centre with € 50,000 per year and Tel Aviv University with an annual sum of € 20,000, especially for summer schools.

A joint directorate will be in charge of the new centre, which will bring together both senior scholars as well as early career researchers. There are also plans for joint courses from the 2022 summer semester onwards and the creation of a joint English-taught master’s degree programme. Professor Christian Wiese, holder of the Martin Buber Professorship at Goethe University, Director of the Buber-Rosenzweig Institute and the research centre’s initiator, sees great potential in the partnership: “In the framework of German-Israeli academic relations and the close connection between the cities of Frankfurt and Tel Aviv, we’re creating something very special here – an international research hub in the field of interdisciplinary religious studies that looks at topics from a historical perspective as well as in the context of present times that challenge both societies, the German and the Israeli, each in different ways.”

The contract was signed today in Tel Aviv in the presence of Dr Susanne Wasum-Rainer, German Ambassador to Israel. Due to the pandemic, the participants in Frankfurt joined the ceremony via Zoom. Professor Ariel Porat, President of Tel Aviv University, headed the meeting on the Israeli side.

Professor Enrico Schleiff, President of Goethe University
“What we are agreeing upon today is, as far as I am aware, unprecedented – at least in the humanities in Germany. It is not merely a formal cooperation between a German and an Israeli university, but rather the development of a highly visible, joint institutionalized international research centre.
The centre is cross-departmental on both sides and working in an area of study that is most relevant to the German and the Israeli society alike: the history of and the present challenges in religious diversity, difference and conflict in pluralistic societies. It will focus on questions regarding inter-religious dialogue, religious fundamentalism and conflict, but also on the rich cultural heritage and the potential inherent in religious traditions. This centre is the start of an even closer cooperation.”

Dr Susanne Wasum-Rainer, German Ambassador to Israel

“Academic exchange and cooperation are not only a constitutive pillar of German-Israeli relations. They are also a contribution to strengthening research and scientific progress as a global endeavour, in science as well as in the humanities. By declaring their will to establish a joint Centre for the Study of Religious and Inter-religious Dynamics, Goethe University and Tel Aviv University are addressing one of the urgent questions of our time, the role of religious communities in a changing and conflictual world.”

Professor Menachem Fisch, initiator at Tel Aviv University

“I’m delighted to be involved in the setting up of such a unique, first-of-its-kind centre for the study of the monotheistic faiths and their reciprocal development. It is a worthy initiative and another building block in academic collaboration between the two countries.”

Uwe Becker, President of the German Friends Association of Tel Aviv University

“This MOU marks a new milestone in the special relationship between the two universities and is also another bridge of understanding between Frankfurt and Tel Aviv. The new centre will for sure contribute to a better inter-religious dialogue from different angles and perspectives. I am proud that with the launch of the new German Friendship Fund we will also help students to participate in this German-Israeli experience and benefit from the activities of the German Friends Association of Tel Aviv University.”

Professor Milette Shamir (TAU Vice President International):

“Tel Aviv University has a wide collaborative network with German universities, more than with any other country in Europe. This collaboration includes hundreds of joint research projects as well as hundreds of German students who come to our campus each year. The joint centre expands this collaboration in an important new direction and reinforces our existing partnership with Goethe University, one of the leading universities in Germany. We hope that in the near future GU and TAU will expand collaboration to several other areas of common strength.”

Caption:
Goethe University and Tel Aviv University want to establish a joint research centre for religious studies and inter-religious dialogue. The letter of intent was signed at a large gathering, with GU president Professor Schleiff (left) and Professor Wiese

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