

PARLEMENT EUROPEEN



DÉPUTÉ AU PARLEMENT EUROPÉEN

Brussels, 5th February 2016

Honourable Prime Minister, Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu,

For many years Israel has been the only democracy in the Middle East – a fact that Israel's citizens are justifiably very proud of. We, Members of the Delegation for Relations with Israel and of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament respective long-term committed to the relations with Israel, believe that Israel's democracy is an invaluable achievement, especially in light of the unstable situation in the region. For many decades, this democratic character of Israeli society has been the basis on which German political foundations have been operating, promoting common values such as liberty, democracy, rule of law, pluralism and tolerance, within and outside of Germany, as well as strengthening the cooperation between Germany and Israel.

Activities and projects of the German political foundations aim to support political ties with parliamentarians and with Members of the Israeli government. These contacts contribute significantly to the development of projects within Israel and abroad. Additionally, the foundations work in close and constructive cooperation with various parts of Israel's open and pluralistic civil society which impresses through its diversity and commitment. Such a strong civil society guarantees the stability and vitality of Israel's democracy. Especially during the year 2015, which marked the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Israel and Germany, this cooperation with Israel's civil society has been widely celebrated and highly appreciated.



Against this background, we express our deep concern over the planned Transparency law, which was presented by Minister of Justice Ayelet Shaked to the public on November 1st, 2015. We fear that this new law – if it was adopted by the Knesset – would fundamentally restrict the work of Israeli NGOs and the activities of Israel's civil society overall. In particular, we are concerned that the law in its current form would restrict Israel's pluralistic civil society in its ability to unfold freely and complicate, if not obstruct, the work of various NGOs within Israel.

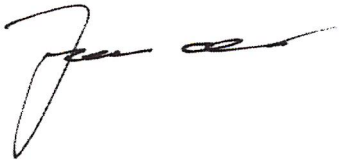
While we share the opinion that NGOs just like governments or businesses have an obligation to be transparent about their sources of funding, we find it difficult to understand why this draft law addresses only certain parts of civil society while others, mainly privately funded NGOs with substantial impact on Israeli politics and legislation, are excluded. Many of the NGOs that would be affected by the law are partners with whom the foundations have cooperated for many years. Out of experience and based on our good cooperation with our partners within Israel's vibrant civil society, we can attest that they are committed to the rights of minorities and stand up for civil rights, thereby strengthening Israel's democracy overall. Additionally, it must be mentioned that NGO partners of the foundations already disclose foreign financing in a transparent manner.

Collectively, we believe that restraining the work of civil society would also jeopardize the work of the German political foundations in Israel – a vivid manifestation of German-Israeli commitment and friendship. When they work on joint projects with Israeli NGOs, they pay special attention to the independent and autonomous character of their partnering organizations, a guiding principle which is of utmost importance. All of their cooperation is exclusively based on common values and shared interests.




Finally, we are voicing our concern on behalf of the continuing constructive development of German-Israeli relations, knowing that any restriction of activities in Israel's outstanding civil society would be an impediment for the freedom of expression in Israel, which would in turn also affect the exceptionally strong relations between our two countries.

Sincerely yours,



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