

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is really a great pleasure for me to address this conference today, and in effect, also to close it. Ever since I arrived in Israel, the Jerusalem Post has been a daily companion, a companion not always friendly to the EU, but fair most times and always a great source of information.

Now allow me a couple of personal reflections: I have learnt a lot in the past two years, and not only from the Jerusalem Post. I have traveled throughout the country from north to south and met hundreds of inspiring and amazing people.

Israel has indeed come a long way since I worked as a volunteer on a kibbutz in the early 1970s to its present status as a world class high tech hub.

Israelis can be proud of their many achievements. Most of all, I have been overwhelmed by the hospitality and warmth of the people I met here.

People with a truly big heart.

I visited the hospital in Tzfat where Israeli doctors and nurses treat wounded Syrians who escaped the hell of the civil war. I met patients from Gaza receiving life-saving care in Israel. I have great admiration for all those who – even at the most difficult, and painful moments of conflict – are still

mindful of the human suffering on the other side.

Sadly, during the past two years, Israelis have often had to live through difficult days. I will always remember the shock of the brutal kidnapping and murder of three teenagers Naftali Frenkel, Gilad Shaer and Eyal Yifrach last June. I am thinking today of the families of the 14 Israelis killed in terror attacks over the last month and a half.

These are difficult days, and I want to reiterate: The European Union condemns terrorism anywhere it occurs, without any ifs and buts. Whether in Paris, in Jerusalem or in

Otniel. Nothing, absolutely nothing, can justify terrorism.

Europe is very much aware of the security challenges that Israel faces. We fully recognize Israel's right to defend itself and its duty to protect its citizens.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
the bond between Israel and Europe is unbreakable and indispensable.

It is unbreakable because Israelis and Europeans have so much in common: history, culture and values , personal ties, family relations, and a joint maritime border.

Europe and Israel have grown closer together – with more flights and cheaper airfares since our Open Skies Agreement two years ago. More and more Israelis are choosing to live in the EU, at least for a while. And more and more European Jews are choosing to make Aliyah. That's their right. Our responsibility in Europe is to make sure that this is not an Aliyah of fear.

European Jews must be able to feel safe. It is unacceptable that some should feel that they have no other choice but to leave. Jewish life is an integral part of Europe. Without European Jews, Europe would not be Europe.

We must not ignore reality. Anti-Semitism is rearing its ugly head in Europe. There have been despicable attacks against Jews. This is unacceptable. The EU is committed to fight anti-Semitism in all its forms. These are not empty slogans, we mean action. For example, the EU has passed Europe-wide legislation criminalizing hate speech and Holocaust denial. In December, we will host a high-level seminar on anti-Semitism in Brussels, to continue our dialogue with Israel and others on this issue.

The bond between Israel and Europe is not only unbreakable, it is also indispensable because, as neighbours, we share common interests. Both in

our bilateral cooperation and in the region.

Let me just give you one amazing example of what European and Israeli researchers, supported by our research programme Horizon 2020, are doing together in the field of life-saving research. In one of our joint projects researchers at the Hebrew University, discovered the genetic trick through which a parasite causing the most devastating form of malaria bypasses the human immune system. . Up to one million people, mainly pregnant women and young children, are killed each year by this parasite. Hopefully, our joint research will pave the way for new therapies and vaccines against malaria.

We are extremely proud of what Israeli and European researchers are doing together. When I recently attended an event on EU-Israel science cooperation, celebrating Israeli research grantees who have received millions of Euros to do cutting-edge research under Horizon 2020, I asked myself: How could anyone plausibly accuse the EU of boycotting Israel? Certainly, supporters of BDS have not managed to damage EU-Israel research cooperation – and we will not allow them to do so.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Europe is getting closer to the Middle East, and the Middle East is getting

closer to Europe. The horrible attacks in Paris last Friday were organized and perpetrated, by all accounts, by Da'esh. Those attacks were directed not only against France, but against our European values and our culture. They were attacks against all of us. The EU has been working actively to build a united front in the fight against Da'esh. We must not only fight Da'esh, we must defeat Da'esh. A military effort is obviously needed for this. And there are diplomatic and economic components, such as the current efforts by the EU and others to organize a political transition in Syria. I would like to emphasize one point in particular: We should not mix up the perpetrators of the Paris attacks with

the millions of refugees from the Syrian conflict. There must be no confusion between the issue of refugees and migration and the terrorist threats. The Paris terrorists are exactly what the refugees from Syria and Iraq are fleeing from. We have a duty to protect those in need of protection who are escaping from the very same threats that we are facing in Europe today.

Let me say a few words about the refugees arriving at Europe's borders. Their absorption is a challenge of historic proportions. The task is formidable. But we will live up to our responsibility and manage this challenge. These men and women and children, fleeing war and destruction

are braving a perilous journey to come to Europe because they see Europe as the beacon of hope, compassion and respect for human rights. We should be proud of that. We must not fall into the trap of equating Islam with jihadism. The vast majority of refugees have turned their backs on radical Islam. Warnings of a take-over of Europe by radical Islam are therefore nothing but dangerous fear-mongering. It is not diversity that weakens us or threatens us. It is, in fact, the fear of diversity that could destroy the open societies that make Europe what it is.

Together with our partners in Africa and in the Middle East, we need to manage the refugee flows and we will

have to address their root causes. At the same time, the EU will continue to contribute to stabilizing and supporting countries in the region, such as Jordan and Lebanon, which have taken in millions of Syrian refugees.

Israel shares our interest in making the region more stable and more secure. Our political dialogue, our intelligence cooperation, our cooperation on counter-terrorism are all evidence of that. We appreciate and value very highly Israel's analysis and intelligence on regional developments.

We are currently finalizing our review of the European Neighborhood Policy in which Israel is included. One of the new elements will be a stronger focus

on security cooperation. It is impossible not to think of Israel here.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The bond between Europe and Israel is unbreakable and indispensable and for the most part, our relations are consensual and thriving. But it is no secret that we do not agree on all points

Yet even where we do not agree it is important to keep a sense of proportion and not to confuse fact with fiction. Talks of a European boycott do not stand up to a reality check.

Let me say this loud and clear: Europe is not boycotting Israel, and Europe is not boycotting settlements. Products from settlements will continue to enter the EU market. We oppose boycotts and BDS.

The European Union has been accused of a variety of sins, including today from this podium: anti-Semitism, hypocrisy, immorality, rewarding terrorism, destroying Palestinian jobs. These allegations have been made by people coming from the highest echelons in this country.

If you have not done so, I strongly suggest that you read the European Commission's Notice on indication of origin yourself.

It explains that, under EU consumer law, it is not permissible to write "Made in Israel" on a product from an Israeli settlement. That would be incorrect and misleading information. A similar rule has been enacted by the US. Marking a settlement product as "Made in Israel" is also incorrect in the US. It should also be incorrect from Israel's point of view: After all, no Israeli government has ever claimed that the West Bank is part of Israel.

I have been shocked to hear claims of anti-Semitism and historic comparisons or analogies to the persecution of Jews in Germany in the 1930s and 40s. In my view, this is a distortion of history and a belittlement of the crimes of the

Nazis and of the memory of their victims.

I have also heard the claim of hypocrisy – and a reference to over 200 other conflicts around the world where there is no labeling. Those comparisons are simply not relevant, because the situations are different. But anyone claiming that the EU is singling out Israel should take a look at the EU's list of restrictive measures and sanctions: It is 140 pages long. And Israel is not on it.

That is because the correct indication of origin is not a sanction. It is the implementation of existing EU law that applies to products from anywhere in the world. The Member States, and not

"overzealous Eurocrats", called on the EU Commission to provide guidance on the specific issue of Israel settlement products. Therefore, this Notice only covers those and clarifies that it is unacceptable to mark them as "Made in Israel" or in other ways that would mislead consumers. However, I want to make it clear that there will be no special warning sticker on settlement products.

Many here have called this a political step designed to punish only one side of the conflict. It is not. We are not preempting the outcome of negotiations on Israel's future borders. This is up to the parties. The European Union has stated that it will accept mutually agreed changes to the pre-

1967 lines, or whatever the parties can agree on. However, until such an agreement is reached, it will continue to differentiate between Israel within its internationally recognized borders and the settlements.

As I said at the outset, I am in favor of an honest and rational debate.

Therefore, I think that we should restore the focus of our discussion to the real issue of disagreement here: The international community considers settlements illegal and a major obstacle to peace. Israel does not. This is what we should be talking about even if we do not agree.

Those accusing the EU of hypocrisy have so far failed to answer a simple a

question: How is the stated commitment to a two-state solution compatible with continued building in settlements, including in many settlements beyond the separation barrier that would not be part of Israel in any peace agreement? Like Prime Minister Netanyahu, we have not given up our hope for peace and a two-state solution. But for how much longer can this hope remain alive when continued construction in settlements makes a viable two-state solution increasingly complicated? True, settlements are certainly not the only problem – but they are definitely a significant and crucial problem.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ever since the UK introduced guidelines on origin labelling of settlement products back in 2009, trade between Israel and the UK has doubled. I think it would be beneficial for all of us to keep this fact in mind.

We should focus more on what keeps us together, rather than on what pulls us apart. We should not be shy about dealing with our disagreements, but we should also not let them blind us to all the areas where we actually agree.

Relations with Israel are among the closest, most diverse and most intense the EU has with any non-Member State. Trade with the EU accounts for one third of all of Israel's foreign trade.

It has increased from 20 to 30 billion EUR per year over the last 10 years.

On Friday this week, we will be celebrating the 20th anniversary of the signature of the EU-Israel Association Agreement, which is the basis for Israel's special status in its relations with the EU. Israel and the EU have come a long way in these 20 years. We have signed agreements on liberalizing trade in agricultural and fishery products, on research cooperation, on air traffic. Pharmaceutical products certified in one country can freely circulate between the EU and Israel without need for further certificates. That is an arrangement that the EU only has with a small handful of other non-member states from the G7. It is

testimony to the level of trust and the depth of our relationship. We often take these things for granted. But these are the basic facts of EU-Israel relations. They do not make the headlines. Yet anyone aware of them has to ask: How can a partner and friend invest hundreds of millions in a country, and still be accused of boycotting it?

We may not see eye to eye on everything. But most of the time, we fight for the same values, face similar challenges, and share a neighborhood. You are no doubt more immediately exposed than us – but as I have mentioned, the mental and political distances between our regions are shrinking. We have everything to lose

from looking only at the empty half of the glass. We have everything to gain from focusing on what we can accomplish together.

Toda Raba!