I. The Importance of Civil Society in German-Israeli Relations

(1) A focus on civil society organizations provides a balance to the highly negative attitudes today of Germans towards Israel, as demonstrated in a major poll by the Bertelsmann Foundation.

• Surveys are only a snapshot. If we take a panoramic view of German-Israeli societal relations, as demonstrated by civil society organizations’ engagement over time, we can be much more optimistic about German attitudes towards Israel.

(2) Civil society organizations, in fact, were catalysts for the inception of German-Israeli relations, and then continued to play a crucial role in cementing ties: in the 1950s, the Peace with Israel movement; the Societies for Christian-Jewish Cooperation; the Max Planck Society’s initiative towards the Weizmann Institute; German-Israeli study groups at German universities; the beginning of private youth exchange. All of these organizations pre-dated diplomatic relations.

• In the 1960s, organizations like Action Reconciliation, focusing on young people, and the German trade unions were actively engaged with Israel at a time of no diplomatic relations.

(3) Governments in their policies are inevitably motivated by raison d’état, whereas non-governmental actors can pursue a purely moral agenda. This is highly important in the case of German-Israeli relations in which history has such an indelible imprint. The two governments are clearly attuned to history through policies of compensation, and through official commemoration in a variety of forms, but they also have other pragmatic concerns. Civil society organizations are, then, the life blood that constantly infuses the “culture of remembrance.”

• In addition to providing stability, reliability, calculability, and solidarity, civil society actors proffer an institutional channel for nurturing new generations’ interest and engagement in German-Israeli friendship.

II. Contemporary Challenges to Societal Organizations Engaging Young People in German-Israeli Relations

(1) With the passing of the “witness generation,” it is crucial that we actively attend to the issue of how to bring young people into the relationship and keep them committed. There are five general challenges/questions for civil society organizations as they try to engage young people in German-Israeli relations:

• How can one maintain a balance between centering on the past and focusing on the present and future?
• Can societal institutions revise and revamp their goals and programs and technological tools to resonate with the challenges facing the current generation and to animate their aspirations for the twenty-first century?
• Is the current generation of Israeli and German young people ready for the type of commitment and leadership displayed by previous generations?
• How can societal actors in Israeli-German relations recruit new leadership, not only membership?
• Are we able to establish new channels through which young leaders, as societal actors, can be drawn in to decision fora with governments?

III. The Institutional, Educational and Societal Tools for Keeping Germany’s Culture of Remembrance Vibrant

(1) There are five concrete suggestions for the two governments and two societies:

• Expand youth exchange in two ways: provide more demographic diversity of German and Israeli participants; and make programs trilateral to include young American Jews.
• Take up an earlier proposal for a German-Israeli Historians Commission, which was implemented on the specific question of the history of the German Foreign Office during the Third Reich, and make it permanent and include young historians.
• Create Israel Studies programs in Germany. This is in addition to, but different from, Jewish Studies programs. The purpose is for young Germans to understand the complexity of modern Israeli society and its history. There are significant German and European Studies programs at a number of Israeli universities, but there is no real German equivalent.
• Intensify existing programs like the German-Israeli Future Forum Foundation that brings together young professionals around joint projects.
• In all of this activity promote discussion of issues of responsibility (not guilt), tolerance, xenophobia, democracy, and universal values as key lessons from history for this generation, to be applied in their daily lives.

IV. Conclusion

Organizations like Action Reconciliation and Germany Close Up are bridge-builders in three ways: between the past and the future; between older and current generations; between Germans and Jews. This bridge-building function, coupled with the attendant development of trust, is more vital today than ever before.

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Her first book, *The Special Relationship between West Germany and Israel* (1984), resulted from her doctoral dissertation from MIT in 1977, for which she interviewed 130 Israeli and German political and societal leaders, including the chief Israeli and German negotiators of the 1952 Luxembourg Reparations Agreement; Menachem Begin; Isser Harel (who directed the capture of Eichmann); Ludwig Erhard (who established diplomatic relations with Israel); and the first German and Israeli ambassadors.

Dr. Gardner Feldman has since published widely in the U.S. and Europe on German-Israeli and German-Jewish relations, German foreign policy, and international reconciliation. She has recently published the paperback version of her book entitled *Germany’s Foreign Policy of Reconciliation: From Enmity to Amity* (Rowman & Littlefield), which analyzes Germany’s relations with Israel, France, Poland and Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic from 1949 until 2009.

From 1978 until 1991, Dr. Gardner Feldman was a professor of political science (tenured) at Tufts University in Boston. She was also a Research Associate at Harvard University’s Center for European Studies, where she chaired the German Study Group and edited *German Politics and Society*; and a Research Fellow at Harvard University’s Center for International Affairs, where she chaired the Seminar on the European Community. From 1990 until 1995, Dr. Gardner Feldman was the first Research Director of AICGS and its Co-director in 1995. From 1995 until 1999, she was a Senior Scholar in Residence at the BMW Center for German and European Studies at Georgetown University.

Lily Gardner Feldman (Middle) speaking at event in DC marking 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Germany and Israel