

**Hannes Androsch**

**LAUDATIO**

**On the occasion of the bestowal of the supreme distinction  
„The Grand Decoration in Gold for Services to the Republic of  
Austria“**

**by the Federal Minister, Dr. Johannes Hahn**

**on**

**University Professor, Honorary Dr. and Dr. Itamar Rabinovich**

**Monday, 29 October 2007, 11:00 a.m.**

**In the Audience Chamber of the**

**Federal Ministry for Science and Research**

**Minoritenplatz 5**

**1014 Wien**

**Your Excellencies,**

**Federal Minister, Dr. Hahn**

**Sektionschef, Dr. Frühauf**

**Most respected, Mrs. Rabinovich**

**Distinguished guests,**

**and, of course, my dearest friend, Itamar**

I know that you are as gratified, as all of us are, at the honour that is being bestowed upon you today.

However, in saying as much, I am very well aware that collecting such honours is not an important personal goal of yours.

I also know that you are not in any way inclined to flaunt, or brandish, the many honours you have received to date. Indeed, I can safely reveal that repeated requests could elicit no more than a selection of the prizes, grants and awards which

have been conferred upon you. The full list would be very much longer - distinctions which you have received as a renowned scientist of international standing, and as a versatile politician and diplomat whose influence has extended far beyond the shores of his own country.

As with all the honours you have received up to the present, there are special reasons for the distinction with which you are being honoured today.

By this I do not mean that I seek to provide a formal justification for the award, as this would be quite superfluous, in view of your important and varied achievements.

These speak for themselves, without any need for elaboration on my part. But, personal merit apart, this award is also of great symbolic significance. On the one hand it is recognition for the goals we share and our fruitful cooperation to date. On the other, it is a signal of a new era of cooperation and reconciliation between our two peoples.

The importance of such symbolic gestures cannot be exaggerated when viewed against the backdrop of the past century. I refer to events which are perplexing and incomprehensible to us today, but which, at that time, resulted in such shocking consequences for so many of your people as, indeed, for ours.

As Theodor Herzl produced his thesis „The Jewish State“, in the traumatic aftermath of the so-called “Dreyfuß affair”, no one could really anticipate what was to come. As he convened the first Jewish Congress in Basel one year later, neither he nor anyone else could have imagined the abyss which was looming on the horizon. The full extent of the pending horror would exceed the fantasy of the sickest of minds.

At that time, the political vision of Theodor Herzl created a chimera of hope for millions of people, who were persecuted and threatened for no other reason than their Jewish origin.

The legal basis for the establishment of the State of Israel was laid by the United Nations resolution (No. 181) of 29 November 1947. In recognising the importance of this landmark resolution, we must not lose sight of the fact that this same measure

also confirmed the legal right of the Palestinian people to an independent State of their own.

This has not yet been brought to fruition, and peace has yet to emerge from turmoil. But, the lesson of history is very clear on one point – a lasting peace requires the consent of the protagonists; an imposed peace, without consent, is inevitably accompanied by an expiry date.

My dear Itamar, your commitment to peace was widely recognised through your activities when you were Israel's ambassador to the United States. Your tireless efforts in the pursuit of peace, as Israel's Chief Negotiator with Syria under the political leadership of our mutual friend Yithak Rabin, were universally appreciated. And, it was well known that you ardently sought a settlement with Syria. Sad to say that all efforts to this day, to achieve peace in the Middle East, have fallen short of their objectives, despite the best efforts of such noted personalities as Muhammad Anwar Al Sadat, Ehud Barak and Bill Clinton.

But Hope springs eternal, and it is important that we preserve this hope of a peaceful future. This feeling of hope leads us to believe in a beautiful vision - a Palestine, consisting of two States, and sharing a common destiny of friendly neighbourliness, based on independence and equality. Just as your compatriot Amos Oz pointed out only this very morning.

The rewards of peace, or peace dividend as it has been called, is that of a region embarking on a new phase of unprecedented prosperity, in its strategic role as a bridgehead between Europe and Asia.

This vision is still no more than an aspiration. For us in Austria, it is all the more important that we show awareness and sensitivity towards events in the region. As neighbours, and as a country with close historical links to Israel, we are deeply concerned with developments there.

The creation of borders of all sorts between countries, as well as the erection of physical barriers between peoples, is a development which runs contrary to the spirit

of our age. The current ethos of “globalisation”, which extends far beyond a narrow economic interpretation, emphasises integration rather than separation.

In relations between mature nations, national borders are being relegated to mere lines on a map.

Moreover, the Mediterranean was never perceived as an insurmountable boundary.

The European Union and Israel have entered into a close cooperative agreement, which is similar in many respects to that between the EU on the one hand, and Switzerland, or Norway, on the other. Those Agreements of Association are similar to membership of the European Union in many respects.

But there are many special factors which link Austria and Israel, and which obtain their expression in the positive historical heritage of our two people.

In this context, we would recall the extraordinary and priceless contribution which our Jewish citizens have made to European culture and, especially, to Austrian or, indeed, to Viennese culture. The thread runs from Johann Strauss via Gustav Mahler to Arnold Schonberg, or from Karl Kraus via Stefan Zweig to Elias Canetti, to name but a few.

New and more recent links between our two countries are to be found, above all, in the fields of science, education and research.

For this reason, our awarding you with the **Grand Decoration of Honour in Gold for Services to the Republic of Austria** reflects our wish to honour your achievements for the University of Tel Aviv over many years, and most recently as the President of this renowned institution. In addition to our deepest appreciation for your role in this capacity, we also wish to honour your commitment to promoting understanding, and fostering relations, between our two countries.

In the name of the Society of Friends of the University of Tel Aviv in Austria, as well as on a personal level, I would like to take this opportunity to express my most

heartfelt thanks to you for the extensive and unhesitating support which you have always been prepared to extend to us in pursuit of our common goals.

It was indeed a great honour when Hella Gertner invited me to take over her role in the Society of Friends of the University of Tel Aviv. At the same time I was conscious of the great moral responsibility, to carry on the task she had begun, and to carry it forth in the same spirit and determination she had infused it with.

And the life's work of Hella Gertner was devoted to the task of building bridges between our countries and their people, a task we hope to continue through cooperation with the University of Tel Aviv.

Dear Itamar, in your life's work, as teacher and scientist, you have clearly shown that education and knowledge are the highway to peace, prosperity and freedom. Scientific progress can improve the material welfare of mankind, but this alone is not enough. You have shown that it is also essential to educate future generations to understand that we must live together in harmony, tolerance and mutual assistance. The modern global economy, shrunk as it has through advances in transport and communications, no longer has the capacity to accommodate intolerance and hatred – spatial separation, and isolation, is scarcely an option any more.

What links you and I so closely in this endeavour, is our conviction and faith in the importance of science. As a result, we value the role of universities to provide the intellectual leadership, as well as the moral and ethical guidance for the future. For your part, you have a long and honourable record in this regard, not least as President of the University of Tel Aviv. I have no doubt that your students in Harvard University will benefit from the same enlightened guidance.

It is with considerable gratification that we, the Society of Friends of the University of Tel Aviv in Austria, have been able to support a range of scientific projects. We would like to think that our efforts have helped, in a modest way, to foster progress in scientific research, into some of the important issues confronting mankind today.

We will continue to share these common goals with you, even as the location of your activities changes, and you are exposed to a different environment with new challenges and problems. We will always share this bond, which is born of a conviction, in the indispensability of research and education for the attainment of the goals of mankind. And beyond this, I hope we can continue to enjoy our warm personal friendship, which stems from the road we have travelled together and the experiences we have shared.

This decoration from the Republic of Austria should be seen as a special distinction, a token of recognition and appreciation for your efforts.

In this context, I am particularly gratified that you have taken the time, to travel especially to Vienna, in order to receive this distinction in person.

And I know that this is much more than a mere gesture on your part!