

ISRAEL: 6 most interesting activities in the field of scientific diplomacy

When it comes to Israel and the year 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on the preparations of many initially scheduled projects. Unfortunately, due to very restrictive travel measures taken by the Israeli authorities, it has not been possible to carry out any visits of the Czech scientific delegations to Israel since March 2020, when the complete ban on the entry of foreign nationals into the territory of the State of Israel came into force. Additionally, given simultaneous travel restrictions on the side of the Czech Republic, we were facing a similar situation when it came to planning the trips of the Israeli experts to Prague. As a result, it was not possible to conduct, for example, the visit of Israeli researchers from the prestigious Volcani Research Institute for irrigation and soil erosion control to the Czech University of Life Sciences Prague or arrange the arrival of a delegation of Israeli start-ups in the field of Industry "4.0" to the Czech Republic. However, against all odds, we managed to implement a large variety of activities in the field of scientific diplomacy in 2020, from which we select the six most interesting ones.

In spring 2020, the Czech Science Diplomat in Israel Ms. Delana Mikolášová actively assisted the Technology Agency of the Czech Republic (TA ČR) to be among the group of four VIP countries together with Italy, Germany, and Russia that could join the bilateral calls in the area of applied research with the Israeli Innovation Authority (IIA). The IIA had very limited budget resources for international collaborations in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and significantly restrained all ongoing international programs with more than 40 countries in this field. Neither Hungary nor Poland was able to negotiate similar conditions as the Czech Republic. The joint Czech-Israeli call in the area of applied research is named "DELTA 2" and is tailor-made for companies. The TA ČR had opened the public tender under "DELTA 2 program scheme" for the Czech companies from May to July 2020, the IIA followed by opening their part of the call for Israeli companies from July to September 2020. Eventually, the Czech applicants to the TA ČR submitted 4 joint Czech-Israeli projects. The Israeli IIA, however, obtained only two full submissions by the Israeli companies. Currently, the evaluation of the project proposals on the Israeli side is still ongoing. The results are expected to be announced by the end of January 2021. It is also important to mention that in 2019, in a similar joint call, the TA ČR and IIA evaluation committees selected two joint Czech-Israeli projects for funding for the period of 36 months. These two projects are currently successfully ongoing. Additionally, the TA ČR together with the IIA is planning to announce a similar joint Czech-Israeli project call also in spring/summer 2021. If you represent a Czech or an Israeli company and are interested in having a joint project in the area of applied research with a relevant partner, do not hesitate to contact Ms. Mikolášová, who will be happy to provide you with further information.

In September 2020, Ms. Mikolášová assisted to the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences (UDU CAS) in an international transfer of the unique private collection of art history books from Jerusalem to their depository in Prague. Prof. Binaca Kühnel who is a renowned Israeli art historian at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem donated her private collection of art books and journals to the UDU CAS. In mid-September, Prof. Kühnel's large library consisting of more than 3,000 volumes, with a total length of over 100 meters and a weight of 2 tons, departed Jerusalem for Prague. The collection, nicknamed The Jerusalem Library, contains mainly art literature about the Holy City of Jerusalem with an emphasis on its Middle Ages art masterpieces. It is necessary to mention that the relocation of the library turned out to be quite complicated due to the ongoing strict lockdown in Israel. Eventually, due to immense endeavour of Czech and Israeli institutions, the extraordinary shipment successfully

reached its final destination in Prague to provide Czech art historians a new source of research and inspiration.

In November 2020, the very first Czech-Israeli Women Accelerator (CIWA) was established in Prague. The Czech-Israel Mutual Chamber of Commerce is among its key partners. The accelerator focuses on establishing ties with small and medium-sized companies as well as young student entrepreneurship talents. Additionally, CIWA's main mission is to promote greater involvement of women in the start-up and innovation ecosystems in both countries.

In autumn 2020, Ms. Mikolášová assisted to establish a connection between the Czech scientific team led by doc. Jaroslav Turánek from the company NEXARS and the research group of Prof. Meital Reches from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Both teams pursue a joint interest to collaborate on the development of a sublingual vaccine against COVID-19. The vaccine is currently in the phase of animal trials. As a result, Czech and Israeli researchers together with their colleagues from France and Germany have established an expert communication channel.

On December 15, 2020, the Czech Embassy in Tel Aviv in cooperation with the Czech Ministry of Industry and Trade, the CzechInvest agency, and Israeli partner Axis Innovation organized a webinar named "Czech-Israeli Virtual Forum: Innovation, Start-ups and Strategic Partner". The event was targeting primarily Czech start-ups, incubators, and a wider Czech audience interested in the Israeli innovation ecosystem. The participants could enjoy three lectures by leading Israeli experts from the AtoBe accelerator in Jerusalem, the prestigious Bloomberg magazine and the multinational corporation Kimberly Clark. More than 50 participants attended the webinar in real-time. Tailor-made consultations of the Czech start-ups with Israeli experts followed the webinar.

In late December 2020, Brno University of Technology (BUT) and the Israeli Technion jointly signed the "Inter-institutional agreement on mobility for learners and staff for the years 2020-2023". The agreement envisages the exchange of students and teachers between the two institutions as soon as the epidemiological situation allows. The signature comes as a result of a personal visit of doc. Jan Hajný from the BUT's Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Communication to the Technion that took place in November 2019 with the mission of the Czech researchers in the area of cyber-security. Ms. Mikolášová and the Czech Ministry of Interior organized that mission.

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