

Address by Ambassador Gianluigi Benedetti on the occasion of the Roadshow of Italian Universities in Israel (7-8 September 2020)

Ambassador Giaufret, EU Ambassador to Israel,
Prof. Zilbershatz, Head of the Council of Higher Education,
Prof. Cinquepalmi, Director of the Office for the Internationalization of Higher Education,
Mrs. Emma Afterman, Head of International Policy and Cooperation,
Dear Friends,

I am delighted to open this virtual Roadshow, fruit of the ongoing and strong collaboration between the Council of Higher Education and the Embassy of Italy in Israel.

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to all of you, for prioritizing this project and for giving it very well-deserved attention, despite the fact that it is taking place on a virtual platform and during challenging times.

Our aim in bringing together some of the top Italian Universities and the best Israeli academic institutions, is to create a “shidduch” - a matchmaking - both for short as well as long term.

It is our belief that by introducing the advantages and the specificities of each institution - straightforwardly and in the most personal manner possible - we may actually be able to explore together the numerous opportunities to collaborate in the academic field.

This is particularly important when it comes to promoting the mobility and the joint research between the two Countries, stimulating thereafter the birth of new partnerships, partnership in European and International bids for example.

I believe that there is a wide range of cooperation forms that may be the outcome of today’s meeting, and we are ambitious enough to even envision academic collaborations in the form of Joint Degrees. It can – and should- be done.

There are already numerous agreements in force between Italian and Israeli Academic institutions, focusing mainly on mobility of both students and scholars. However, our in-depth survey has taught us that many of

these agreements have expired, or alas, have never crossed the elusive line between paper and the real world.

It is true that we have the very significant tool of the Erasmus+ program, which serves as fuel to the engine of our partnership. We are truly appreciative to the Council of Higher Education's involvement in the constant promotion of the Erasmus+ program, and for endorsing the arrival of so many Israeli students and scholars to Italy using this program. Our aspiration is to see more - many, many more - coming and going through the Erasmus+ route. Without being presumptuous, I definitely hope that today will turn out to be a big step in this direction.

To reach this goal, the decision of the Israeli government to realize a National Qualification Framework in line with the European one and aiming to aligning the respective academic qualifications is a substantial step forward. I am very proud of the fact that an Italian team was selected among several possible candidates, in order to implement this twinning project, fully financed by the European commission. The project is proceeding well, despite the COVID 19 restrictions, and we all looking forward to the positive results, with benefits for both Israeli and European students.

Before my appointment as Ambassador of Italy in Israel, I served as the Diplomatic Advisor of the Ministers for Education, Universities, and Research in Italy for seven years. So when I was appointed Ambassador to Israel, I knew that one of my main tasks would have been to take concrete, bold steps to enhance the existing collaboration, to make it more concrete, more - in the Israeli slang - Tach'less.

For years and years we have been working on the implementation of our Industrial and Scientific Cooperation Agreement signed between our countries' governments in 2000. Our joint program ensures annual funding for industrial and academic projects and initiatives in cooperation with the Israel Innovation Authority, the Ministry of Science and Technology and the Council for Higher Education.

More than a dozen Joint Labs have been launched in the past decade between Italian and Israeli prominent institutions. Every year we approve and finance an average of 15 industrial and academic projects. Every year

we organize and hold in Israel ten scientific seminars. Every year outstanding scholars and researchers spend a sabbatical period in the other Country. And since last year, every year we support Italian startups that want to spend a period of “acceleration” in Israel.

All of this feels like so much and yet – never enough. It is our belief that in order to maximize the outcomes of this elaborate system, we must go to the source, and encourage collaboration at the earlier stages and I am very pleased to see that all Universities that we have approached this year, immediately and enthusiastically responded to our proposal and are today participating in this meeting at very high and operational level. Thank you very much to all of you!

The Italian higher education system is one of the oldest, most renown, and outstanding in the world, including both Universities and higher education institutions for Fine Arts, Music and Dance. We are pleased to have with us today Prof. Federico Cinquepalmi who will present to you in great accuracy and detail the Italian higher education system before going more in detail with each of the institutions here represented today.

Looking at the program, I am certain you understand just how determined we are to stretch ourselves and provide real opportunities for discussion and for concrete steps towards a better, more in sync, collaboration between the Italian and Israeli academic institutions.

Through the joint pathways between Italian Universities and Israeli Academic institutions – and I refer here to the Erasmus+ program but, moreover, to courses of Joint Degrees at the Master and PhD level - we wish to reach the full potential of the bilateral relations, for the expansion of joint projects and collaborations aimed at developing research, innovative technologies and investment-worthy industrial applications.

In fact I am stubbornly convinced that students and alumni of both Countries who have studied together and have followed for a period of their studies an identical curriculum, in particular when it comes to “hard sciences”, will be more capable to activate strong cooperation for joint R&D, constructing a single bilateral ecosystem of innovation, through the disruptive Israeli technologies and the potentiality of precision manufacturing and industry in Italy.

