

**Gianluigi Benedetti: diplomacy, culture and education
as the bread and butter of his mission
By Prof. Manuela Consonni
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Dear Ambassador Benedetti, dear Gigio, Prof. Cohen, Ambassador Gal, Prof. Sari, Prof. Levi Schaffer, Ms. Lessing, and Ms. Fresia Toma, ladies and gentlemen, it is an honor to be here today, paying a tribute to Ambassador Benedetti who is leaving Israel after four years of dedicated, engaged mission, ready to move on, to his next duty as Ambassador of Italy in Japan, your second home.

A personal perspective that tells about the intense collaboration and unique cooperation we had, grounded on the same vision and the same goals that forged along the years a bond between the Hebrew University and you, and your staff. A bond that became a friendship with you and with your family Sabina and Gaia, who I had the pleasure to meet several times at the Residenza.

From the beginning, from our first conversation, I understood that you were not like the other ambassadors, closed in their diplomatic role, of which you proposed and offered another interpretation: more modern, current, more linked to the concrete, to the urgent needs determined by a daily life, so different, complicated as this country is different and complicated. And you understood that diplomatic relations could not be separated from cultural cooperation. Your engagement to culture is the bread and butter of your work, and is reflected in your diplomatic bildung: Faculty of Law, Ministry of the Foreign Affairs, in the US, seconded to the NATO Office at the US State Department under the prestigious “Fellowship of Hope” Program, as Diplomatic Adviser to the Italian Minister for Public Administration and Innovation, as Diplomatic Adviser to the Minister for Education, Universities and Research, responsible for the coordination of the international activities of the Ministry and the relations with the Research Centers and Universities on international and European affairs, I think we met at Campus Safra with the Minister of Education Francesco Profumo, back then in 2011. Your participation on behalf of the Italian government to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA); Your commitment as responsible of the preparation and management of the semester of the Italian Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the Education, Research and Space sectors. Under the Italian G7 Presidency in 2017, you were in charge of the coordination and preparation of the G7 Science Ministers Meeting, which took place in Torino. And afterwards here.

Thanks to your training, you immediately understood that it was necessary to move forward, to do the impossible, because the possible had already been done or so it seemed. You have thrown yourself headlong into the battle, we share for battle the same passion. Your desire to know, understand, create, develop culture, imposing it as an instrument of dialogue and peace, to open the doors to others, and you understood that here, at the Hebrew University these doors are wide open and we were, and are always ready, to commit ourselves and to work for the improvement of this world. And you looked at us like no other. Not only to engage us in diplomatic duties, Jerusalem has symbolic capital. You have invested time and thought, you have implemented a code of conduct regarding the centrality of culture in your relationships with our university. You have looked at us with attentive eyes, and you have understood that we are serious people, to rely on and to plan and do with. You persisted in successfully promoting and supporting the new Golden Glasses Project and Series on the culture, literature and history of the 20th and 21st centuries Italy at Magnes, the Press of our University, of which I am proudly the editor. Natalia Ginzburg's *Mai devi domandarmi*, just came out on Sunday, translated by Esfir Meilmann, one of the master student at the Italian studies program. The first in the new editorial format, but indeed the second after Giacomo Debenedetti's memoir on the 16 of October 1943, that you introduced last year in a public event remembering the Nazi raid against the Jews of Rome. But there are a third and a fourth, and a fifth book on the line, Ginzburg's *Microhistory*, Primo Levi the *Search for roots*, Furio Jesi, Lalla Romano are next. We implement Primo Levi's dictat that the transaltion of culture is an act of civilization.

You are a diplomat who acts in the name of culture, like a month ago, with the visit of the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Marina Sereni here in Jerusalem with Moshe Halbertal and Michail Karayanni, when you asked me to let her meet two intellectuals and scholars, not just politicians, who could clarify to her the complexity of Jerusalem and Israel, from another perspective. You believe that culture is the key to the future, entangled to politics. Let me quote for a text dear to me, a text that I use to open my first lesson in each of my classes. *Socialism and Culture*, written by Antonio Gramsci in 1916, at the age of 25, on what culture is, and why is so important to study, to understand that the university is an occasion to learn and to develop critical thinking. Education and culture are, for Gramsci in his vision of the role played by the organic intellectual, the same thing. Fighting for culture means fighting for education, and not just for few but for all. Fighting for culture is indeed fighting for social and political justice.

So Gramsci writes: “We need to stop conceiving culture as encyclopedic knowledge, in which the person is seen only in the form of a container to be filled and stored with empirical data; of brute and disconnected facts that she/he will then have to check in her/his brain as in the columns of a dictionary ... (...) Culture is a very different thing. It is organization, discipline of one's inner self, it is taking possession of one's personality, it is the conquest of a higher awareness, through which one is able to understand one's historical value, one's function in life, one's rights and duties. Culture is empowerment, the understanding of ... the reasons for certain facts and the best means to convert them from an occasion for vassalage into a sign of rebellion and social reconstruction. According to Novalis, critical thinking means precisely the consciousness of the self which is the ultimate goal of culture, getting out of chaos, being an element of order, but of one's own order and discipline bent to an ideal. But this path cannot be achieved if one does not also know the others, their history, the efforts they have made to be what they are, to create the civilization they have created. Because there is nothing better than knowing yourself through others and others through yourself.”

You are this, an organic intellectual who carries out his diplomatic and political role starting from an internal passion, permeated by what Schopenhauer opposed to the aesthetic act of the individual, the idea to fulfill a mission. You have never held back in supporting the University and me even when it was not your responsibility: such as the many times you went out of your way to help our students to obtain a visa, acting as an intermediary with the consulate in Jerusalem, overcoming the difficulties, finding reasonable solutions, putting the human aspect before bureaucratic and diplomatic considerations. Not everyone has understood it, it is not just a problem of image but of justice, again A recurrent term. The latest Asmaa Abulatife, a passport from the Palestinian authorities who flew from Ben Gurion Airport for Verona for a workshop on Shakespeare. You helped her to obtain the visa a week. The last battle we of the University and you fought together.

We will miss here at the Hebrew University, a lot, and I will miss personally, as a dear friend, but I know that you have left a group of attentive officials who share your vision. And I trust and hope that your successor will follow your path, thank to them. Dr. Stefano Ventura and Ms. Sarah Eti Castellani, the new Deputy Head Of Mission at Embassy of Italy in Israel. And the new director of the Italian Institute of Culture.

Besides honoring you, let me thank you on behalf of the Hebrew U. and of myself. And I have a plan, which I discussed already with our new dean Prof. Nissim Otmazghin, an expert in modern and contemporary Japan, to continue our cooperation and friendship, to flourish in organizing a symposium between Tokyo, Rome, Jerusalem, and Berlin on Fascism. Take a good care of yourself and your girls, and hug them for me.

Be atzlacha raba be Tokio