

Editorial

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This special issue of the Journal is devoted to a conference on Neurobiology and Neuro-Psychiatric Diseases held in Jerusalem as a joint activity of two Academies—the German Academy of Science Leopoldina and the Israel Academy of Science and Humanities. The Israel Academy is delighted to host such joint activities and welcomes our colleagues from Germany and specially Prof. Volker ter Meulen, the President of the Academy of Leopoldina. In this short editorial I would like to relate to the history and activities of the Israel Academy, in the context of the present conference.

On December 27, 1959, about a decade after the founding of the State of Israel, Prof. Martin Buber proclaimed the establishment of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities and was soon after elected the Academy's first President. The Knesset, Israel's Parliament, formalized the Academy's status by enacting the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities Law (1961). The Academy comprises 99 of Israel's most distinguished scholars. It is divided into two sections, the Natural Sciences and the Humanities (including the Social Sciences), and is administered by a Council consisting of the Academy's President and Vice-President, its Past President, the Chairpersons of the two Sections and the Executive Director. The membership is convened annually in an open and in a closed plenary session, while the Sections meet several times a year. The home of the Academy is in Jerusalem, adjacent to the official residence of Israel's President.

The Academy's principal objectives are: to enlist as its members distinguished scholars and scientists resident in

Israel; to cultivate and promote scholarly and scientific endeavor; to advise the government on activities relating to research and scientific planning of national significance; to maintain contact with parallel bodies abroad; to ensure the representation of Israeli scholarship and science at international institutions and conferences; and to publish writings calculated to promote scholarship and science.

The Academy has spearheaded major initiatives to strengthen basic research in Israel, including: founding the Israel Science Foundation (<http://www.isf.org.il>); taking part in the establishment of a new National Research Council (NRC, 2003) and an active Forum for National Research and Development Infrastructure (TELEM); helping initiate the projected 5-year, \$300 million Israel Nanotechnology Program (INP). It also facilitated the participation of Israeli scientists in cutting-edge research at major international facilities such as CERN and ESRF. The Academy initiated Israel's National Human Genome Project and set-up a Bioethics Advisory Committee dealing primarily with issues related to stem cell research. For many years the Academy has been involved in developing and maintaining National Collections in biology, an undertaking unique in the Middle East, for the documentation and preservation of local biodiversity. Recently a special committee of the Academy has initiated national activity for promoting the biomedical research in the country.

The Israel Academy is the focal point for many scholarly contacts at the individual, organizational and national level between the Israeli research community and its counterparts abroad. Through its 32 international agreements, the Academy promotes and coordinates reciprocal visits by Israeli and foreign scholars. During the period January–December 2008 the Academy hosted 62 visiting scholars from 11 countries for a total of 612 person-days, in

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parallel to reciprocal visits of Israeli scholars abroad. The Academy has played a leading role in several major binational initiatives, including the establishment of Israeli academic centers in Egypt and China. Spearheaded by the historic Israel–Jordan Peace Treaty of 1994, the Association of Middle Eastern (Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Palestinian Authority) and US National Academies of Sciences was established and cooperative activities have taken place since the founding meeting in Amman in 1995.

Israel is an active partner in ICSU, ESF, the European Framework Programme and other major international initiatives, and Israeli researchers hold prominent positions in many of them. The Israel Academy is taking part in many Inter-Academy activities and organizations, such as the Inter-Academy Panel (IAP) the All European Academies (ALLEA), as well as the newly formed Association of the Mediterranean Countries Academies.

The relations with Germany are very meaningful and multi-faceted: An agreement for Scientific Cooperation with the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences was signed in Berlin in June 2000. The two academies co-sponsor a joint project for producing a critical edition of the collected works of Martin Buber, the first President of the

Israel Academy. In 2003 the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) signed a tripartite agreement with both the Israel Academy and the Israel Science Foundation (ISF), to promote joint research projects, seminars and workshops, and mutual scientific visits. Three Israeli researchers visited Germany under the Agreement in 2008. Under their January 2009 Agreement, the Israel Academy and the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation will sponsor a series of periodic German–Israeli Frontiers in the Humanities Symposia to bring together outstanding young scholars (about 25 from each country) to encourage them to think beyond the confines of their own disciplines.

The present joint International Symposium on the Neurobiology of Neuro-Psychiatric Diseases forms an additional link in this active cooperation. The conference, personally opened by the presidents of both Academies, discussed the recent advances—at the cellular level—in the understanding and potential treatment of Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease, post-traumatic stress, schizophrenia, anxiety, and other disorders, as evident in the following articles and reviews.

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