

Good evening!

Presidential Couple,

Mr President, Madam Kornhauser-Duda,

Andrzej and Agata,

I remember our ceremony in Jerusalem two years ago when I had a huge honour to be presented by Mr President with the Order of the White Eagle. It was an honour for me and, since it was connected with the meeting with President Rivlin, I perceived it not as a personal award but one for the sake of a new reconciliation between our nations. I felt that it was necessary, that it was possible and that it would happen. I still believe that it is very much necessary, very possible and that it will happen.

We have a crisis. Not the first one. Our relations are very complicated. This is not the first time. However, as already stressed by Rabbi Schudrich, and as repeatedly stressed by Rabbi Stambler, and as has been underlined by our Ambassador, my friend, Doctor Alexander Ben Zvi, who already speaks Polish so well– wow! I envy him! It took me longer. We share so many years of common history. Now the question is simple: why so many years together, and why so many Jews? The largest world Jewish centre in diaspora, the second one being in the United States. Probably it was better here than in other places across Europe. As simple as that. There is no other reason whatsoever. There has never been a ghetto in Poland. The first ghetto was established near Częstochowa, in Piotrków Trybunalski. A German ghetto, in 1940.

Mr President,

Looking from today's perspective, and this is not the first time we have met, I felt that it came from your heart. What comes from heart, enters heart. And right now it is immensely important. We will overcome this misunderstanding, we will surmount it. And I have a kind of obligation in this respect. We have two ambassadors – one from those past times and the other one from today. Once I served as Israel's Ambassador to Poland, whereas now my friend Doctor Ben Zvi is doing the same job. And this is a difficult challenge, specific one. It seems to me Mr President has said that we would come back to normal life between our states. We can never return to normal life between our nations – it's either bad or very well. There is nothing mediocre here because it is so specific. So uncommon, so different. Now we are a bit on this side. But it will pass.

I might have a personal responsibility because for seven years I served as Director of Yad Vashem and it seems to me, I actually know, that this initiative was not started by Yad Vashem. I'm going to use blunt language now and I hope they will forgive me, or no, they don't need to forgive me. This conference is being organized by a gentleman whose name is Kantor (**in Polish "kantor" means*

currency exchange bureau). I am sorry but he has organized it like a currency exchange bureau. Trade with history! This is not the right thing to do! This is what I thought to myself. I served here, our Ambassador is here now to continue building the bridges of understanding between our nations. This is a matter of history, not of politics in concrete terms. This is not as you say: one more vote in the UN, one more vote in the EU. I do not underestimate it but we have so few votes anyway that one vote less does not make a difference. This is something deeper and more important, something taller and broader. And so it's going to be, so it has to be. Let me add one more sentence in conclusion. I've been informed that a big part of the press, of the media in Israel today support the decision of the President not to go to such a conference. So after all, it is important. After all that happened, after the difficulties in the last two years, and the difficulties were there, something is happening. Hundreds of thousands of Jews, of Israelis are coming to Poland, there are ten flights a day, an increase of 800 percent compared to five or six years ago. They come back to Israel and return to Poland once again. For three days, for five days. Precisely in the context of normal relations. They come to the Polish capital, to Polish mountains, to Polish trees, to Polish restaurants, to Polish cosmetics, to Polish medicine, to take a walk – all Jewish ethnic groups in Israel. This also constitutes a symbol, a litmus test that it's going to be all right!

Thank you.

** translator's note*