

B'NAI B'RITH EUROPE---SPECIAL NEWS
B'NAI B'RITH EUROPE AWARD OF MERIT
DR ANGELA MERKEL
CHANCELLOR OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY
GALA DINNER—11 MARCH 2008 BERLIN

By John P. Reeves

The glittering banqueting hall of the Marriott Hotel at the Potsdamer Platz in Berlin provided the splendid venue for a Gala Dinner on 11th March 2008 in the course of which Dr Angela Merkel Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany was the recipient of a Gold Medal for outstanding services, the *B'nai B'rith Europe Award of Merit*, being the highest accolade of BBEurope.

The Gala Dinner was attended by more than two hundred distinguished and high-ranking guests representing the world of politics, industry, commerce and culture, together with Members of BBE Executive, Presidents of Lodges, Sisters and Brothers from many countries of our fraternity. Among the great and good we met Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Ehrenberg, the Israeli ambassador Yoram Ben-Zeev, entrepreneurs Mario and Ute Ohoven, Regine Sixt the founder of the international charity *Children in Need*, the film-actor Mario Adorf, Countess Elizabeth of Bavaria, Sir Peter James Torry the former British Ambassador - to name but a few.

President Reinold Simon in his poignant Welcome address recalled the understandable misgivings of many of the survivors of the Holocaust when in 2001 Berlin was selected as the venue where the first B'nai B'rith Europe Convention was to be held.

The audience was not only reminded of the longstanding ties between B'nai B'rith in Germany, where as far back as 1882 the first Lodge outside the USA was established, but we also learned that the twelve founders of our Order in 1843 in New York were Jewish immigrants from Germany.

In the year 1932 the German District counted no less than 13,000 members among more than a hundred lodges, only to be dissolved by the Nazis in 1937.

Yet, following the Second World War it was in Berlin that the Leo Baeck Lodge was re-established in friendship and warm reception among its citizens.

The reunification and the ensuing political changes have accelerated the substantial numerical increase of the Jewish Community in Germany.

“It is a different Germany, a country of democracy, and freedom, committed to human rights and a driving force of European integration, a real model, prudently led by the Chancellor, who is truly deserving to receive this highest honour bestowed upon her”—concluded President Simon.

Charlotte Knoblach, President of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, conveyed greetings of her organisation and emphasised the important humanitarian and charitable work carried out by B'nai B'rith lodges in Germany within the European context. She warmly congratulated the

Chancellor Dr Angela Merkel for receiving this singular honour and expressed her desire to continue to foster the good relationship between B'nai B'rith and the Central Council.

Lord Weidenfeld the renowned publisher, politician and philanthropist, in his outstanding laudatory speech, reminded the audience of the dissemination and defence of the four aims of the mission of B'nai B'rith with which Chancellor Merkel has fully identified herself—both in words and deeds. -- the security of Israel; the defence of Jewish communities in Europe against the new forms of anti-Semitism; the defence of human rights throughout the world; the determining role of upbringing being the precursor of tolerance.

The dedicated support of these aims “engraves you, Chancellor Merkel, in the heart of the Jewish people as one of our outstanding and reliable companions” - said the speaker.

Lord Weidenfeld stressed that “the Chancellor’s avowed friendship with Israel has at all times been the leitmotif of her political philosophy”.

Notable and concrete evidence of Israel’s priority in Germany’s foreign policy under the Chancellor’s term of office has been the systematic fostering and maintenance of close relationship with Israel and to elevate such bond to the same level as with the USA, France, Poland and Russia.

Being honoured with the Leo Baeck Prize and receiving the honorary doctorate from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem are eloquent and moving testimonies of her commitment to the Jewish World and to Israel.

Lord Weidenfeld also reminded his audience that the positive aspects of Germany’s official relationship with the Jewish world should not lead us astray and underestimate beneath the official political representations throughout Europe the trends of the emerging anti-Semitism in the form of new cloaks and colours.

The various anti-Semitic manifestations in today’s Europe are closely associated with anti-Americanism, fuelled, controlled and financed by extreme Islamist sources .

The fight against such evils undermining democracy has from inception clearly defined Chancellor Merkels’s political carrier.

The speaker expressed his full confidence in the Chancellor’s affinity to the ideas of the mission of our Order wherefrom she would not waiver.

In conclusion of his *Laudatio* Lord Weidenfeld congratulated B'nai B'rith and Chancellor Merkel, the recipient of the honour, and said: ”We hope that for many years to come you will work for the ideals and ideas of B'nai B'rith—for peace, reconciliation and human rights”.

Reinold Simon, President of B'nai B'rith Europe and Joseph H. Domberger, Honorary President of B'nai B'rith Europe, escorting the Chancellor, rose to the platform and bestowed upon her the Gold Medal of B'nai B'rith Europe for humanitarian services.

The Award document reads:

“In recognition for her services in the fight against racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism, her solidarity with the State of Israel and the Jewish Community, her commitment for a united Europe and her political fairness, her emphatic defence of freedom and human rights

B'nai B'rith Europe bestows its highest honour, the '*Gold Medal for distinguished leadership*' upon Mrs Dr Angela Merkel, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany.. In this way we wish to honour a remarkable personality, whose statesmanlike responsibility also extends to peacemaking in the Middle East.

Berlin, on 11 March 2008.

Reinold Simon, President BBEurope

Joseph H.Domberger, Hon. President BBEurope”

In her thought provoking address the Chancellor expressed her grateful thanks to B'nai B'rith Europe for the honour bestowed upon her.

At the commencement of her speech she recalled the recent sad passing of Professor Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich, the renowned theologian and a distinguished member of our Order who fostered friendly relationships between Jews and non-Jews in Germany.

The desire for freedom, peace and dignity for all men and the ongoing threat from various corners of the world to derail and to frustrate these noble aims was the theme of Dr Merkel's presentation.

The celebrations of the 60th Anniversary year of the State of Israel have been overshadowed by the recent brutal attacks on a seminary in Jerusalem with many innocent young losing their lives. The Chancellor made reference to the important first German-Israeli inter-governmental consultation that will take place in Jerusalem, with the attendance of the Foreign Affairs, Environmental Affairs, Justice, and Defence Ministers.

The serious threat of the Iranian nuclear programme aimed against the State of Israel forms an important part of the agenda.

“The international community must resolve, be united and take any necessary steps against Iran and persuade her to forgo plans to attain nuclear arms threatening the world.

Following the horrors of the Shoah, the Federal Republic of Germany and the German people have a special responsibility for the existence of the State of Israel”—declared the Chancellor.

The role of education and the proper upbringing of the younger generation are a prerequisite of tolerance. In the absence of historical knowledge coupled with an inner conscience of the validity of true values, the fight against anti-Semitism cannot succeed. These essential moral standards and attitudes must be developed in each generation anew.

Dr Merkel specially thanked President Reinold Simon for his Welcome address and for the reference he made to the First Convention of B'nai B'rith Europe held in Berlin in 2001.

She also expressed her joy witnessing the flourishing Jewish life in Germany, the successful integration of Russian Jewish immigrants and the contribution made by B'nai B'rith to achieve this.

In conclusion, the Chancellor exhorted her audience to strive for freedom, peace and dignity within the family, among neighbours, in professional life, in community activities, in charitable and public service organisations such as B'nai B'rith.

Her address was greeted with a standing ovation.

The programme and a lovely dinner was graced with a musical interlude on the violin by the highly talented **Sara Spitzer** , who was accompanied by **Mike Yim** on the piano. The emotive

presentation of Bloch's *Niggun* and the stirring theme from *Shindler's List* was greeted by the audience with appreciation.

Sabine Christiansen gracefully moderated the proceedings.

The presence of television cameras and newspaper reporters (*Berliner Morgenpost*, *Der Tagesspiegel*) have given a well deserved wide publicity for B'nai B'rith Europe.

Congratulations are due to President Reinold Simon and his team for arranging this glittering event.