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1. Netanyahu in USA

Israels Regierungschef Benjamin Netanyahu lobte beim Besuch im Weißen Haus die Zusammenarbeit mit den USA unter Präsident Donald Trump. Beide Politiker stehen innenpolitisch unter Druck. Netanyahu droht ein Verfahren wegen Vertrauensmissbrauchs. Im Mittelpunkt des Gesprächs stand das Atomabkommen mit dem Iran und der Einfluss Teherans. Trump erwog die Möglichkeit eines Besuchs zur Eröffnung der US-Botschaft, die anlässlich des 70. Gründungsjubiläums des Staates Israel von Tel Aviv nach Jerusalem verlegt werden soll. Damit würde der US-Präsident ein Wahlkampfversprechen einlösen. Gleichzeitig sorgte die angekündigte Botschaftsverlegung bei den Palästinensern und in Jordanien für heftige Kritik. In seiner Rede vor der AIPAC, dem American Israel Public Affairs Committee, erinnerte Netanyahu an die Errungenschaften des israelischen Staates.

A US Embassy in Jerusalem is a game changer

(...) Placing the US embassy in Jerusalem (...) emphasizes its value as a capital of peace for Jews, Christians, Muslims and anyone else who seeks it. Everyone is equal, everyone is free, and everyone is recognized. And there is no international law that forbids a country to relocate its embassy. (...) Even though Trump's move seems controversial, it is important that in any peace process Jerusalem remain free for all. (...) Israel and America stand firm on core

values like the importance of life, freedom and democracy (...) that seeks to resolve conflicts through understanding and words, not through heated tension in which no one listens. (...) Khan Yonay, JPO, 03.03.18

As Trump and Netanyahu meet, our plea as inter-faith leaders: Stop boosting the proponents of a religious war

President Trump's decision in December to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital and commence moving the US embassy was harmful enough. And still, he has managed (...) to make it worse. (...) This latest announcement, regarding the opening of an interim embassy in Jerusalem on May 14, is particularly significant. On this day, more than any other, Israeli and Palestinian narratives collide. The flip-side of Israel's May 14th celebration of statehood is the stateless Palestinians' commemoration of the Nakba (...). By choosing this date, Trump privileges the Israeli narrative of 1948 over the Palestinian one (...). Narrative issues are not mere symbolism. They impact prospects for peace. (...) Rather than removing Jerusalem from the table, Trump thrust it to the forefront, contributing to the destructive and unnecessary transformation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from a political to a religious struggle, playing into the hands of those on all sides who reject comprehensive peace. (...) If Trump wants to broker Israeli-Palestinian peace, he must recalibrate U.S. policy to

acknowledge legitimate claims for both Israelis and Palestinians. (...) President Trump must support a shared Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and the future Palestinian state, with details to be determined in negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. (...) Mae Elise Cannon, Yahya Hendi, Debra Shushan, HAA, 05.03.18

Light unto the region

(...) We can't think of another Israeli politician who can work the crowd better than Netanyahu – and do it in perfect English. Netanyahu seemed unaffected by the four separate investigations into purported wrongdoings (...) in the last part of his speech, the mood changed. Netanyahu emphasized the danger presented by Iran in Syria, where Tehran seeks to set up military bases and gain access to a naval base in Tartus from which to attack Israel. (...) While we agree with Netanyahu that Iran must be stopped, the prime minister's doomsday mood was incongruous with the first part of his speech, which rightly pointed out that Israel's situation in its 70th year has never been better militarily, economically and socially. No one can threaten to take over Israeli territory. As bad as Iran is it (...) cannot invade Israel or take over the Golan Heights. (...) We understand the prime minister's desire in a high profile appearance in Washington to emphasize Tehran's malevolent impact in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon and the Gaza Strip. But in doing so he need not make it seem as though Israel is too weak to bring light where Iran brings darkness.

Editorial, JPO, 07.03.18

American Jewry's outcry

(...) it seems the miracle of the inception of the Jewish state is lost on the younger generation, who take it for granted. The importance of the Holocaust as one of the core issues that shaped the country is also fading. This stems from a lack of education, a lack of knowledge, and mainly a lack of interest to deal with the question of identity. Therefore, it is not only the approach toward Israel that has been eroded but the approach toward Jewish identity, as well. (...) The attitude towards Israel (...) can also serve as an element of identity among Jewish American youth, but this requires a change of attitude. Israel, as the Jewish state, should champion this important mission, making it into a worldwide Jewish national enterprise. We must hear American Jewry's outcry. After decades of it supporting Israel, we would be wise to come to its aid.

Dror Eydar, IHY, 07.03.18

Netanyahu Is Bragging About His Diplomatic Failures Again

At the end of the meeting with U.S. President Donald Trump in the White House, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu boasted that no draft or timetable of the U.S. peace plan had been presented to him. (...) The Israeli public is supposed to accept as self-evident that Netanyahu couldn't have dreamed of a friendlier president and more generous gestures. (...)

But the problem of the State of Israel is not one of image (...). The problem of the State of Israel is that for 50 years it has been keeping over 2.5 million Palestinians (...) under military control (...). The State of Israel's problem is that in the territories beyond the Green Line that it is holding onto by force, it is on the spectrum between occupation and apartheid. (...) Israel is just as much in need of a solution as are the Palestinians. And therefore, if Trump were concerned about the good of the State of Israel, he would force it and the Palestinians to negotiate until diplomatic white smoke emerges, and to sign a fair agreement for dividing the land.

Editorial, HAA, 07.03.18

Nothing less than a revolution

(...) the current visit to the American capital by the Israeli leader is a reflection of the dramatic shift in the special ties between the two nations since Jan. 20, 2017. Affection and support have replaced attempts by the American superpower to conceal the points of contention and resentment that clouded U.S.-Israel relations in the Obama era. (...) Even Trump's body language as he sat alongside Netanyahu (...) displayed genuine warmth and friendliness toward his guest in direct opposition to the cold demeanor typical of Obama in his public meetings with Netanyahu. The Palestinian issue, perceived as the main stumbling block to reconciliation and regional calm in the Obama era, has now been sidelined. (...) the president's approach to the Palestinian Authority remains critical and confrontational. (...) Trump's demand the Palestinians return to the negotiating table is yet another link in the chain of actions and statements that separate Trump light years from his predecessor, whose policies brought the U.S. back to the dark days of U.S. President Jimmy Carter and the failed attempts to force Israel to agree to the outlines of a one-sided final status agreement on the Palestinian front. A revolution, indeed.

Prof. Abraham Ben-Zvi, IHY, 06.03.18

As an Israeli at AIPAC, I felt the love

(...) As someone who participates in many conferences abroad where Israel is either clearly unpopular if not openly denounced, or in the better cases grudgingly accepted, at AIPAC Israel is allowed to shine. (...) the policy conference also confronts the thorny political and security issues, and these are discussed frankly and in-depth (...). With a mix of Americans and Israelis on many of these panels, US-Israel relations are expressed by means of the speakers' perspectives, and are sometimes targeted directly as the topic of debate. (...) Despite the organization's fierce insistence on a bipartisan approach, AIPAC is often perceived by people – usually those not familiar with the organization's work – as leaning quite significantly to the right, and this image might have been enhanced by the very fact that J-Street was created as some kind of left-wing alternative to AIPAC. (...) Yes, the AIPAC crowd will cheer the Israeli prime minister, but not because he's right-wing – I believe it is because he is the prime minister of Israel. (...) at the end of the day it always comes back to that feeling of being surrounded by thousands of people who openly and eagerly support Israel. (...) I wish more Israelis – especially young Israelis, especially soldiers – could come to the policy conference, and feel the love. In today's world that's no small matter.

Emily B. Landau, TOI, 13.03.18

Netanyahu's new mandate to lead

By any objective standard, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's trip to Washington (...) was a stunning success. (...) In reality, the public has an interest in renewing the government's mandate. Working together, the police and the media have used the probes against Netanyahu to destabilize the government and delegitimize its power. (...) The fact that the police have demonstrated no credible proof of their claims that Netanyahu accepted bribes in any of their leaks or official statements regarding any of their multiple probes is of no consequence. As far as the major radio, television and print media are concerned, Netanyahu is a crook. (...) Under the circumstances, the need for a new mandate is self-evident. The public is the source of the government's power. (...) So the public has to express its views on the government in one way or another. (...) Netanyahu wanted to disband the Knesset and announce an election this week, he was right to feel the way he did. He wasn't being egotistical. The public's interest is harmed by the delegitimization of its government. (...) The police and even the

attorney-general cannot replace the public. (...) The public wants Netanyahu to keep leading the country. Caroline B. Glick, JPO, 15.03.18

2. Frühere Vertraute Netanyahus wollen als Kronzeugen aussagen

Mit Benjamin Netanyahus langjährigem Medienberater Nir Hefetz wird ein zweiter Vertrauter des Regierungschefs Kronzeuge im Zuge der Ermittlungen um Israels größtes Telekom-Unternehmen Bezeq. Netanyahu wird verdächtigt, in seiner Zeit als Kommunikationsminister Bezeq begünstigt zu haben. Im Gegenzug soll das zum Unternehmen gehörende Nachrichtenportal "Walla" positiv über ihn und seine Familie berichtet haben. Kurz zuvor war Shlomo Filber, ebenfalls ein Vertrauter Netanyahus und ehemals Generaldirektor des Kommunikationsministeriums, eine Kronzeugen-Vereinbarung eingegangen. Nach gut einjährigen Ermittlungen hatte Israels Polizei bereits im Februar eine Anklage wegen Korruption gegen Netanyahu empfohlen. Es seien ausreichend Beweise für Bestechlichkeit, Betrug und Untreue in zwei Fällen gesammelt worden. Über eine Anklage muss der Generalstaatsanwalt entscheiden. Netanyahu wies sämtliche Vorwürfe gegen ihn stets als "absurd" zurück. Seiner Popularität konnten die Korruptionsaffären bislang keinen Abbruch tun. Netanyahu hätte gute Chancen, bei vorgezogenen Neuwahlen erneut als Gewinner hervorzugehen.

Hefetz's political motivation

(...) Hefetz's plea bargain to turn state's witness (...) has to be viewed through a political prism, much like the other developments of the past several weeks in relation to the crusade of investigations against the prime minister. (...) Outwardly it appears as if the case against Netanyahu is a slam dunk. But it hasn't crippled his standing among his base supporters. (...) Will Hefetz and the information he allegedly possesses play a starring role on Yair Lapid's campaign commercials? Anything is possible. Police leaks will find their way to reporters, become headlines, and from there, campaign slogans. Netanyahu might consider it opportune to let Litzman throw a full tantrum – to have the dirty work done by others. The temptation is considerable at this point, now that Hefetz has joined the opposition, to take control of matters with elections.

Amnon Lord, IHY, 06.03.18

The photo on the wall

(...) if elections were held right about now, the Likud under Benjamin Netanyahu would garner 29 Knesset seats, giving it the highest number of any party. (...) the results came after Case 4000 broke wide open. (...) everyone is presumed innocent unless found guilty. But each dawning day, it appears more and more that Netanyahu has been playing the system to the max – and the rest of us for utter fools. (...) The time has come to start searching in earnest for someone else – anyone else (...).

Lawrence Rifkin, JPO, 07.03.18

Master brainwasher Netanyahu builds world of lies in which he is the innocent victim

(...) Benjamin Netanyahu and his minions are (...) trying to manufacture a separate factual universe that holds Netanyahu's denial of the allegations against him as a self-evident truth. He is the innocent victim. His legal problems are totally unwarranted. (...) Netanyahu in his distress is protecting his original sins with a bodyguard of lies. In Netanyahu's world of falsehoods, taking expensive gifts from tycoons with vested interests is the norm. Efforts to subjugate and castrate the country's free press are desirable. Selling state assets in exchange for positive media coverage is the way of the world. (...) Netanyahu has at his disposal legions of useful idiots, in politics and the media, who spread his anti-Israel libel throughout the land, out of ignorance and prejudice. (...) After long years of near-solitary rule and his relentless agitation against internal and external enemies, large chunks of Israeli public opinion are like putty in the hands of a master brainwasher like Netanyahu. The belief in his delusional conspiracy theories is more palatable for them than coming to terms with the reality of a leader who is evading justice and refusing to go. (...) Chemi Shalev, HAA, 06.03.18

Netanyahu needs a pardon and a goodbye

(...) Netanyahu isn't asking for government stability, but for a form of managed chaos; unstable and scared citizens are the bread and butter of his rule. (...) This is a battle for absolute power as Israel's eternal leader who will obliterate all its enemies and first and foremost the peace process with the Palestinians. (...) The next election will bring Israeli democracy, which is now on its sickbed, nearer a critical state. If politicians delude themselves that after they win an additional Knesset seat from the public, Netanyahu will give up all this delight and retire to his dacha in Ma'asiyahu Prison, they should sober up now. An open process in which Netanyahu

buys a pardon in return for his confession and leaves the nightmare years of his rule behind us will be the best deal we can achieve. Otherwise, hold on tight. We're in for a rough time.

Iril Leal, HAA, 09.03.18

Offering Netanyahu a pardon is a threat to democracy

(...) At the heart of Netanyahu's media strategy lies paranoia, which becomes crazier and more shameless with each passing day. (...) Netanyahu will make do only with the offer of a pardon; he won't need to accept it. He can then manage the election campaign while in possession of the ultimate proof of the delusional paranoia he's trying to sell (...). The offer of a pardon harbors an even greater danger. It will signal to the public and to every corrupt politician that the route to escaping the clutches of the law lies in incitement and hanging on desperately. Precedents such as these will shape the future character of the rule of law in Israel. (...) Israel's citizens are about to take part in one of the most significant battles in this country's history. This battle will be over the soul of Israeli democracy. We have no way of preventing it. It will come. It will take place at polling booths and in the streets. Instead of wallowing in illusions about magical, futile solutions, we would do better now to start getting prepared.

Zehava Galon, HAA, 13.03.18

Odds are in Netanyahu's favor, but elections hold some risks too

(...) the only person who stands to gain from elections at this time is the person who is allegedly calling for their prevention. (...) elections are vital for the prime minister. Netanyahu understands that his difficult legal battle must be fought from the position of a strong leader with a political clock that has just started ticking. Put simply, he needs a new term. (...) gaining the public's trust now, while he is neck-deep in investigations, could turn a possible announcement of an indictment into a smaller event. (...) Netanyahu also knows that investigations during an election campaign won't be pleasant. (...) Netanyahu's risk of losing the elections—a scenario which currently seems completely unrealistic—is huge. He might have to deal with his legal fate without the courtesy and respect an interrogated prime minister is unofficially entitled to. (...)

Moran Azulay, YED, 13.03.18

Out of left field

Israeli pundits have contracted a disease known as Netanyahu Hatred Syndrome. It has been rapidly metastasizing and they are now terminally ill. (...) Their arguments have become delusional. (...) According to the pundits, Netanyahu had concluded that winning another election would influence the attorney general before he decides on a possible indictment against the prime minister in the current corruption investigations. The (...) forgot that elections do not give immunity from prosecution, and they forgot that attorneys general do things their own way. (...) Netanyahu is sophisticated and knows how to defuse crises by keeping his cool. That is what helped him fend off an early election. (...)

Dr. Haim Shine, IHY, 15.03.18

3. Koalitionskrise beigelegt

In dritter Lesung stimmten die Abgeordneten der Knesset für den Haushalt. Damit war der Streit um die Wehrpflicht für streng religiöse Männer, über den die Koalition in eine schwere Krise geraten war, beigelegt. Ultraorthodoxe Regierungsparteien hatten damit gedroht, dem staatlichen Budget für das kommende Jahr nur unter der Bedingung zuzustimmen, dass ein Gesetz zur Befreiung der Haredim vom Wehrdienst verabschiedet werde. Sogar vorgezogene Neuwahlen waren temporär im Gespräch. Letztlich einigten sich die Koalitionspartner darauf, die Option vorerst beizubehalten, die es ultra-orthodoxen Männern ermöglicht, immer wieder Aufschub gewährt zu bekommen, sofern sie sich beim Militär registrieren lassen. In der Koalition von Ministerpräsident Netanyahu sind die Ausnahmen umstritten.

One step too far

(...) The Likud and the haredi parties have been together for a long time. (...) but it seems that the haredim have gone one step too far – not with their demand to pass a new bill exempting haredi men from the draft (...) but with their demand that it be done immediately. (...) The coalition has worked diligently to pass all the laws the haredim have recently demanded. It's unclear why such experienced, savvy politicians don't understand that piling the draft exemption bill on top of that right now is just too much. (...)

Mati Tuchfeld, IHY, 04.03.18

All Israeli men should be drafted at 18 – including the ultra-Orthodox

That's how it is in a minoritocracy. Everything is distorted. (...) The minority, which constitutes only 12 percent of the population and 11 percent of the MKs, dominates the majority. (...) As with every successful extortionist, success increases their appetite. This time the subject is the draft deferment law, which is nothing more than the law for evading service in the Israel Defense Forces. (...) the extortionate behavior of the Haredim didn't start today, but in the present government it has reached a peak (...). They succeeded in passing a law that enables them to completely evade service in the IDF, but the High Court of Justice rejected it for reasons of inequality. Their response: to pass a Basic Law for Torah students, which will supersede the principle of equality. And that's the reason for the present crisis. (...) The Haredim like to tell us all kinds of fairy tales about the importance of Torah study and how it's saving the Jewish people. But those who really are saving the Jewish people are the combat soldiers, who risk their lives for 32 months, and then go on to study engineering, medicine, liberal arts, education and management, and work hard all their lives and pay full taxes – which finances the draft evaders. (...) Instead of a new draft-evasion law for the Haredim, all Haredi, religious Zionist and secular men should be drafted at the age of 18, for full service, without quotas and without tricks, and then the burden on secular youth will be reduced somewhat. Any other solution is distorted, unfair and will end in a revolt of the secular community.

Nehemia Shtrasler, HAA, 06.03.18

Killing oneself in Torah study

(...) there can be no possible justification for a significant and growing proportion of Israel's young to dodge the draft on the grounds that they are yeshiva students. (...) Jewish law states categorically that everyone must play her/his part in the defense of the country (...). In the entire history of our people from the Exodus from Egypt until the establishment of the State of Israel there is not a single example of where a percentage of the population was exempt from military service because they were studying Torah. Those *charedi* political parties who insist that their segment of society not serve in the IDF are doing both Israel and their followers a disservice. (...) Furthermore, the IDF is a melting pot, which helps many find their place in society. (...) Those *charedim* who "separate themselves from the community" will always remain apart. They (...) are frequently

referred to as parasites. (...) Those politicians who care about Israel's future should be working to change the *status quo* rather than being prepared to maintain it for the sake of political advantage.

Michael Boyden, TOI, 13.03.18

Should the IDF be an army of the people or army for the people

(...) We can gnash our teeth and feel our stomachs turn at the tricks the government is playing to survive a few more months in the corral that isolates them from the public. (...) there is the option of changing approaches. But because of the original sin – giving the army the role of being a melting pot for Israeli society and turning it into a symbol of equality – the very thought of a professional army, one that wouldn't have to depend on those who don't want to serve but would instead grant proper benefits to those who really want a military career, raises shivers up and down the national spine. (...) the distorted draft exemption bill calls for a re-examining of the basic assumptions that have given it its pervasively destructive political power. Is the assumption — that without the draft we will have no army — really true? Surveys suggest otherwise. Can the army serve as a melting pot? The society it helped create is far from perfect, especially with regard to equality. The IDF itself is coming to terms with the possibility that in the not-too-distant future it will become a professional army. Now it's society's turn to start getting used to the idea.

Zvi Bar'el, HAA, 14.03.18

Reason has prevailed

(...) an end to a crisis like this is an excellent time to draw political conclusions and forge a way onward. The haredi MKs might have the most work to do when it comes to that. (...) The haredi parties should devote the next year and a half to thinking about and taking steps to neutralize the political dangers that are going to pop up in the next few years. (...) The one bright spot for the haredim in this crisis is the victory of reason – that the haredi MKs refused to beat their heads against a brick wall and held firm in the face of criticism from their own camp. The broad concessions on the conscription bill are hard for them to swallow, but if in the past claims were made that the haredi MKs had caved to the haredi media (...), this time, they held their ground. It's possible (...) that they deserve credit for letting reason and common sense prevail.

Yehuda Shlezinger, IHY, 14.03.18

Stop funding Haredim, reward soldiers instead

(...) Less than half of 18-year-olds enlist today, and the number decreases every year. (...) Despite all the efforts, most Haredim haven't enlisted and won't serve in the future either. All the decisions and laws from the past and those that are yet to come won't change a thing, just like an attempt at forcing Arabs to enlist would have failed miserably. (...) A young Haredi man reporting to the recruitment center has two options: To enlist in the IDF or in a yeshiva. Clearly, the vast majority pick the yeshiva, they are forbidden to work and are funded by the state. How foolish is that? There is a simple solution: To exempt Haredim, as well as Arabs and religious girls. A young Haredi will be like any other young Israeli who is exempted from military service. He won't be funded by the state and will be able to do as he pleases: If he wants to study—let him study; if he wants to work—let him work; and if he wants to join the army—let him join the army, like quite a few Bedouins and Christians who do so even though they don't have to. (...) With the money saved from funding yeshiva students, about NIS 2 billion a year, the state will pay the salaries of IDF soldiers in the third year of their service. (...) That's the proper way to respect and reward soldiers who gave three years of their life for the security of the State of Israel and its citizens. (...)

Haim Ramon, YED, 15.03.18

4. Medienquerschnitt

Nein zum Nationalstaatsgesetz

Don't fix it, just nix it

(...) The nation-state bill is the rightist government's flagship piece of legislation and is intended to violate the equal rights of Israel's Arabs, which were promised in the Declaration of Independence. (...) The current bill enables de facto geographic separation between Jews and Arabs, due to the "separate settlement clause." Attorney General Avichai Mendelblit was right to make it clear that he opposed this clause. (...) This clause means that there can be a sign in the acceptance committee saying "no entry to non-Jews." (...) No democracy allows legislation that establishes its national character without granting complete equality to minorities, both in legislation and in declaration. If the nation-state bill's goal is indeed to be Israel's identity card, then the party leaders concocting the current bill know full well that Israel already has one: the Declaration of Independence. But instead of

celebrating it, they are undermining it, and by so doing they are also undermining Israel's seminal fundamental values, first and foremost the value of equal rights for all the state's citizens. (...) This is a harmful bill, one that will have a bad effect on the attitude of Israel's non-Jewish citizens toward the state that wants to legalize discrimination against them, and on the world's regard for Israeli democracy. The right thing to do is to renounce this bill.
Editorial, HAA, 15.03.18

Die Handlanger Teherans stoppen

Enhancing the counter-Iran strategy by going after its proxies

(...) Iran's network of terror is well entrenched throughout the Middle East, and uprooting its influence will require a broad effort that targets every instrument of Tehran's malign activity. (...) Tehran cultivates proxies to serve its broad strategic interests. (...) The recent chaos in Iraq, Syria and Yemen has presented an opportunity for Iran to mobilize and expand its legions of foreign militias, creating many more Hezbollahs that we must confront. (...) We must use every instrument of national power to reverse Iran's advance across the Middle East. There is clearly more to do, and our bill would be a good next step in a larger strategy to counter Iran. Targeting Iran's vital proxies will send a clear signal to the region that America is committed to reversing Tehran's advance and restoring stability. And that's just the way it is.

Ted Poe, JPO, 08.03.18

Wachsende soziale Kluften

OECD exposes a bipolar Israel

Israel's good economic performance hides extreme and worrying gaps that are liable to worsen. (...) The OECD presents Israel as a bi-polar society: an economy of flourishing high tech and finance, versus an economy of low productivity in the rest of industry; an economy (...) of the secular and modern orthodox versus an economy of haredim (...) and Arabs; a positive and hopeful short term versus a long term that arouses pessimism and concern. (...) The relative poverty level in Israel stands at a little over 18% of the population. (...) It's easy to focus the blame on the haredim and Arabs, but the problems do not stop there. (...) since 2006, the Israeli worker

has produced two-thirds of what a worker in the top half of the developed countries produces per hour. (...) Road congestion in Israel is the highest by some way. (...) The tax burden on business in Israel is the highest, and by some way. (...) Within less than 50 years, every third Israeli will be haredi. But even if the integration of the haredim succeeds, even if they study the core curriculum in school and receive training identical to what other Israelis receive, even then Israel will have to run to stay on the spot in productivity, standard of living, and certainly road congestion.

Amiram Barkat, GLO, 12.03.18

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Verantwortlich:

Hermann Bünz,

Leiter der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Israel

Redaktion:

Susanne Knaul

Judith Stelmach

Homepage: www.fes.org.il

Email: fes@fes.org.il