

Israel-Estonia Joint Issue • Litwinsky House, Tel Aviv

Israel - 70 years • Estonia - 100 years

Estonia and Israel celebrated the 25th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations in 2017. The State of Israel recognized the Republic of Estonia in September 1991 and diplomatic relations were established on January 9, 1992.

Interestingly, the diplomatic ties between Estonia and the region of Palestine have a longer history. The Republic of Estonia appointed an Honorary Consul to the British Governor of Palestine in 1929 and the Honorary Consulate of the Republic of Estonia was located at Litwinsky House.

Today, Estonia and the State of Israel consider themselves similar in many ways. Both countries are proud of being modern young states ready to accept the technological and security challenges of the 21st century. Both countries are recognized world leaders in the IT and cyber security realm (Estonia and Israel are among the founding members of the Digital 5 Countries international forum) and both boast an impressive number of start-up companies. The contacts and cooperation between Estonia and Israel, in their private as well as public sectors, are expanding to include the whole realm of economic and technological innovation.

A Jewish presence in Estonia was first recorded in 1333, but their numbers remained small until the 18th century. The Republic of Estonia granted Jews cultural autonomy in 1926 – the first country in Europe to do so. This cultural autonomy was renounced in 1940 as a result of the Soviet occupation and restored after Estonia regained its independence in 1991.

Today there is a smaller, but very dynamic and active Jewish community in Estonia, numbering approximately 2000 members. There is a synagogue (reopened in 2010) and Jewish Cultural Center in Tallinn as well as a Jewish school, kindergarten and social center.

Many Estonian Jews have made Aliyah to Israel during various pre-war or later periods and some 800 Estonian citizens live in Israel today. The number of those Israeli citizens who have other historical ties with Estonia is higher, as many as 2000.

Litwinsky House

The Litwinsky House is an outstanding architectural building in Tel Aviv. It was built by Yaakov Elhanan Litwinsky (1852-1916), a well-known businessman who immigrated from Odessa. Before that he had purchased one of the original sixty-six lots in Ahuzat Bayit, the nucleus of the future Tel Aviv. The house he built with his family at 22 Achad Ha'am Street was one of the most impressive homes in the new neighborhood.

In the 1930's the son of Yaakov Litwinsky, Mr. Maurice Litwinsky (1888-1951), played a noteworthy role developing political and economic relations between the Republic of Estonia and (then) Palestine. Maurice Litwinsky was appointed Honorary Consul of Estonia in Jaffe and Tel Aviv on April 5th, 1929 by the Foreign

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Minister of Estonia. The Consulate was officially opened on May 15th, 1930.

Mr. Maurice Litwinsky, a well-known personality in Tel Aviv, was active in banking and trade but did not limit his activities to promoting business and consular issues. He also established contacts between several Jewish and Estonian educational institutions, libraries and publishing houses. These contacts lasted until the beginning of World War II.

Maurice Litwinsky's consul's office was located on the second floor of the Litwinsky House. The Estonian foreign ministry sent the Estonian coat of arms to Tel Aviv. It was hung on the 2nd floor balcony railing and the national flag waved above on the roof. The national coat of arms disappeared after 1948, but the flag was kept by the Litwinsky family and was handed to the Estonian ambassador to Israel for safe-keeping in 2015.

For some 30 years a large restaurant operated in the Litwinsky House and in 2005 it was passed to new owners, Acro Real Estate and Canada Israel Group, who implemented the preservation and restoration of the house according to the conservation plan of Amnon Bar Or & Co. Architects Ltd. The aim was to restore the building back to its original form as it was in the 1930s. Today the residents of Tel Aviv and tourists, including citizens of Estonia visiting Israel, can admire the Litwinsky House, as professionally restored to its original architectural idea. When visiting, one can stop and take a moment to look back at the historical mix of architecture and diplomacy that the Litwinsky House embodies.

H.E Mr. Sulev Kannike Ambassador of the Republic of Estonia

* The stamp features a photograph of the Litwinsky house from a booklet by the Litwinsky brothers. Our thanks to Shay Farkash, who documents and preserves murals and architectural color.

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