

# News

## Couillard meets Netanyahu at end of successful mission

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Premier Philippe Couillard concluded the five-day economic and institutional mission he led to Israel and the West Bank by meeting with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at his office in Jerusalem on May 25, the first such encounter between leaders of the Quebec and Israeli governments.

Afterward, Couillard said he is confident that as a result of the mission Quebec and Israeli businesses and institutions will create mutually beneficial partnerships, particularly in innovation. He is considering opening a Quebec commercial office in Israel to further strengthen the ties.

"We came here to learn and observe, but we learned much more than we had anticipated," he said at the end of the mission. "We wanted to understand what has made Israel into the country that it is today, a country of extraordinary dynamism. The notion of the 'startup nation' is just a part of the story. It's much more than that. It's a state with spirit and culture that has evolved in an environment that is not easy and never has been."

Among the topics he discussed with Netanyahu was possible collaboration in the field of artificial intelligence, which the Quebec government plans to make a major investment in.

"Our Israeli partner is recognized globally for its capacity to commercialize ideas developed by its entrepreneurs and institutions. That's why the delegation returns to Quebec with a wealth of knowledge that will permit us to accelerate the transformation

[of its own ecosystem]," he stated.

As he had at the beginning of the mission when he met with Palestinian Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah in Ramallah, Couillard let the Israeli leader know that Quebec is ready to contribute to peace. Specifically, he offered the province's support for economic initiatives in the West Bank, as well as professional and technical training there.

More than 100 business people and representatives of research institutes and universities from throughout the province, participated in the mission. It was the first official visit by a sitting Quebec premier to Israel.

The delegates principally came from the fields of aerospace, life sciences and medical, information and digital technologies.

About 20 co-operation agreements were signed between the Quebecers and their counterparts in Israel and the West Bank. The value of commercial trade between Quebec and Israel was \$345.5 million in 2016, a 32 per cent increase over the year before.

This includes the setting up of a \$12-million bilateral research and development program with the Israel Innovation Authority. Both parties commit to \$3 million over five years to support industrial R&D projects. This \$6-million investment is to be matched by participating research partners.

According to the plan, enterprises will be invited to work with academic institutions in the joint development of innovative technologies.

"International partnerships in R&D and



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, left, meets Premier Philippe Couillard in his Jerusalem office.

innovation have become a must in the world today," said Dominique Anglade, minister of economy, science and innovation, who accompanied the premier. "Israel's leadership in technology, research and innovation makes it a partner of choice to develop advanced technologies and state-of-the-art commercialization tools."

Another noteworthy agreement was between Hydro-Québec and the Israel Electric Corporation (IEC), also a public utility, to collaborate in cybersecurity, which is concerned with protecting electronic data from hacking. The two parties will share knowledge and best practices in combating this growing threat.

Chairman of the board Michael Penner, who signed on behalf of Hydro-Québec, noted that IEC is a world leader in development of cybersecurity.

In the academic sphere, Concordia University was especially keen on forming new partnerships and reinforcing existing ones in the region.

"These economic missions are important on so many levels," said vice-president for advancement and external relations Bram Freedman. "Concordia's international reputation is growing and we are always looking at new ways to create opportunities for academic co-operation internationally."

Among the agreements signed was one with Technion for an exchange program between its Bronica Entrepreneurship Centre and Concordia's District 3 Innovation Centre. The exchange will allow four individuals from each side to visit the other to learn best practices and develop a closer connection between their respective ecosystems.

The delegation visited a number of incubators and start-ups on the mission but Concordia was unique in signing a joint agreement, Freedman noted.

Another exchange program partnership was signed with Bethlehem University in the West Bank that will see students and professors from the two institutions engage in academic and research exchange opportunities in the areas of accounting, finance and commerce. Students taking part in this exchange program will have their tuition fees waived at the host institution.

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Concordia also signed off on a joint research project with Ben-Gurion University of the Negev that will bring together researchers and students looking into the “technophobia” associated with aging.

Concordia and Ben-Gurion will also collaborate on a second project, “Privacy and the Internet of Things,” that will take advantage of the world-class centres on cybersecurity which each boasts.

The Ecole des Hautes Etudes Commerciales (HEC) agreed to exchange expertise with OurCrowd, which raises venture capital for early-stage startups.

Couillard attended the groundbreaking for a new building at Tel Aviv University’s Azrieli School of Architecture, named for its benefactor, the late David Azrieli of Montreal. The Azrieli Foundation has donated 50 million NIS (\$19 million) toward the project, which, it is touted, will put the school on par with the most prestigious schools in the world.

Tel Aviv University president Joseph Klafter bestowed on the premier the President’s Prize in recognition of his efforts to promote bilateral relations between Quebec and Israel and for friendship toward the Jewish people.

Couillard visited a Hand in Hand school, part of a network of six public schools which Jewish and Arab students attend equally. For some years Quebec teachers



**Premier Philippe Couillard at a Shabbat dinner hosted by CIJA. From left are Ambassador Deborah Lyons, Consul General to Quebec and the Atlantic Provinces Zev Nevo Kulman and Deborah Corber, CEO of Federation CJA.**

have shared with the schools expertise in teaching a second language and inter-cultural instruction.

The premier also headed north to Metul-lah for a quick visit to the Canada-Israel Hockey School, donning a Montreal Canadiens jersey to the delight of his host, Sidney Greenberg, a major donor to the school.

The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs played a key role in the organization of the mission, and Quebec vice-president Eta Yudin and co-chair Rabbi Reuben Poupko, who participated, are pleased with how it

went.

“To accompany the premier through Yad Vashem [his first stop] was a great honour,” said Rabbi Poupko.

“He was profoundly moved by the museum and the memorial. The premier demonstrated great knowledge and sensitivity during his time there. Moments like that are quite revealing about a man’s character, and his reaction leaves one deeply impressed.”

Yudin added, “Both as a Jew and as a Quebecer, I am proud to have been part

of and witness to the first official visit of a sitting Quebec premier to Israel. I have always believed that Quebec and Israel share values and make natural partners. The outcomes of this historic mission are very impressive and will bring Quebec and Israel closer on many levels.

“Both Israel and Quebec are eager to develop their relationship and build mutually beneficial partnerships in the many areas of shared expertise they have in common. There will certainly be significant followup in the months to come to the benefit of Quebecers and Israelis alike.”

D’Arcy McGee MNA David Birnbaum, who attended the 40-minute meeting with Netanyahu, said the prime minister reacted positively to the idea of a bilateral entente on artificial intelligence and big data, and “directed his aides to ensure prompt followup.

“Quebec is charting a leading course on the world stage in these sectors and both men understand the importance of them to future economic and social progress.”

Birnbaum said Netanyahu expressed appreciation for Couillard’s peace proposal. “There was a mutual understanding that economic growth and educational progress will be key to lasting peace. The prime minister also reacted positively to the suggestion that Israel now reciprocate with a similar return mission to Quebec.” ■



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