

Czech president vows to move embassy to Jerusalem in speech to Knesset



Czech President Milos Zeman, pictured July 2018, released a joint statement with other Czech political leaders saying the opening of a “Czech House” in Jerusalem would be “the first step in the plan to move the Czech embassy” there **Michal Cizek (AFP/File)**

Czech President Milos Zeman reiterated his promise to open his country’s embassy to Jerusalem in a speech to the Israeli parliament (Knesset) on Monday, while stressing his solidarity with the Jewish people.

“Prime Minister Netanyahu said that the Czech Republic is the best friend of Israel in Europe. I wonder why only in Europe,” Zeman said, causing laughter in the parliament.

“My speech is a message of solidarity with Israel and Jewish people,” Zeman continued. “We Europeans, and now I do not speak about America, I speak about the EU in fact, sometimes hesitate more. We sometimes are cowards. It is very impolite, isn’t it? But I am afraid it is frank. And that’s why it is necessary all the time (to stand in) solidarity with Israel. Because if we betray Israel, we betray ourselves.”

Earlier on Monday, Netanyahu told his Likud faction that Zeman had promised to move the Czech embassy to Jerusalem, a promise the Czech President echoed in the Knesset on Monday.

“Tomorrow I will open the Czech House. Where? In Jerusalem. And it connects CzechInvest, CzechTrade, CzechTourism, and so on. I am no dictator, unfortunately. But I promise I will do my best in order to realize the third step, after the honorary consulate and Czech House. And you can guess what is to be the third step,” Zeman said.

The new “Czech House” will shelter government institutions including the foreign ministry’s Czech Center, the CzechTrade trade agency and CzechTourism tourism agency.



Czech President Milos Zeman (left) speaks alongside President Reuven Rivlin (right) in Jerusalem, November 26, 2018 Mark Neiman (GPO)

The Czech Embassy has been located in Tel Aviv since 1949, except during the interruption of diplomatic relations under the former communist regime in Prague between 1967 and 1990.

The Czech President also said his European counterparts often acted as “cowards” on issues concerning Israel, and that they should stand in solidarity with the Jewish state.

Netanyahu welcomed the Czech President in the Knesset, praising him for being “one of the first leaders in this generation to recognize Jerusalem as Israel’s capital.”

The Israeli Prime Minister also spoke about the need for Israel’s presence in the Judea and Samaria (West Bank).

Without Israeli defense in that area, Netanyahu said, radical Islamism will fill the void and threaten the existence of Israel.

Netanyahu also warned about the consequences of “dangerous concessions, including uprooting communities,” which he said “hasn’t happened, and won’t happen with me.”

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