

| | | | | | |
|--|---|--------|----------------------------|------------|------------|
| 8.13x33.83 | 1 | עמוד 9 | the jerusalem post - front | 29/07/2018 | 64560261-0 |
| בנימין זאב הרצל - בהקשר לציונו - 80790 | | | | | |

Losing the bond

Last week, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his coalition partners celebrated the passage of the controversial Nation-State Law. The prime minister viewed its enactment as a continuation of the process Theodor Herzl, founder of the Zionist movement, started over a century ago.

“One hundred twenty-two years after Herzl published his vision, we have stated by law the basic principle of our existence,” Netanyahu said from the Knesset podium.

But now, following a public protest by members of the Druze community, Netanyahu and his coalition partners seem to be having a change of heart. First was Education Minister Naftali Bennett, who announced on Wednesday that the law harms “our Druze brothers.

“This, of course, was not the intention of the Israeli government. These are our brothers who stand shoulder to shoulder with us on the battlefield and made a covenant with us – a covenant of life.

“We, the government of Israel, have a responsibility to find a way to heal the rift,” Bennett said.

Next was Finance Minister Moshe Kahlon, who said that the law was passed too quickly and without proper consideration. “We were wrong and we need to fix it,” he said.

And on Friday, Netanyahu met with Druze leaders and promised to establish a committee, headed by his chief of staff, to study the issue.

In other words, the three senior members of the governing coalition all admit that the law is flawed. What they aren’t admitting is that they knew this all along, except until now they didn’t care.

We, for example, wrote in the past that while we understood the need for a bill that states clearly and unequivocally that Israel is the Jewish state, it was wrong not to include a clause that all citizens in Israel have equal rights.

The absence of such language in the law – which has the status of a Basic Law – undermines the strength of Israel’s democracy and undercuts the values reflected in the Declaration of Independence according to which all inhabitants of Israel, including the Arab and Druze minorities, should have equal rights like the Jews.

This law was not passed hastily, as Kahlon claimed. It had been in the works for years and had been considered by consecutive governments. Netanyahu, it seems, was eager to pass the law now – right before the Knesset broke for its summer recess – since he wanted to bolster his right-wing nationalistic credentials ahead of the next election, which is predicted to be held sometime early next year.

By doing that, the government undercut the bond between Jews and Druze, one that dates back to 1948 when, after Israel’s establishment, the Druze sided with Israel and have since climbed the IDF’s ranks, serving with honor and distinction in all of the military’s various positions and ranks. Druze are integrated into all spheres of Israeli society – government, business, hi-tech and more.

Meeting with Netanyahu on Friday, the Druze politicians, whose 140,000 constituents live in the Galilee and the Golan Heights, said they would not stop their public campaign against the law until it is amended.

“We won’t be bought with benefits,” Yisrael Beytenu MK Hamad Amer said. “What we want is the law to guarantee equality for minorities who are willing to fight for the state.”

We agree. While the government should have avoided this situation and revised the bill before it was passed, now that it recognizes its mistake, it has an obligation to correct what it did wrong.

The bond between Jews and Druze in Israel has served as a model of what Israeli-Arab relations can look like not just within the Jewish state but throughout the entire Middle East.

That relationship is a strength for Israel. It shows how diverse the country can be and how Jews and Arabs can get along.

There is time to correct this injustice. When the Knesset reconvenes from its recess in October, this is the first item it should address. Better late than never.