Technion to switch to English in its main MBA program

By Cnaan Liphshiz

Almost 100 years after its establishment sparked a heated debate over using European languages in education, the Technion yesterday announced the opening of its first-ever program of study in English - an MBA plan.

As of the next academic year, the Technion Israel Institute of Technology in Haifa will switch from Hebrew to English for students seeking a masters in business administration. The institution's smaller Tel Aviv branch will continue to teach the program in Hebrew.

The Technion's establishment in 1912 as a German-language institution triggered the so-called language wars between Zionist Hebrew revivalists and the institute's founders, who considered Hebrew unsuitable for scientific instruction. The Technion's charter was eventually revised to make Hebrew its only language.

"To make the English-program legal, we requested our board of governors to pass a resolution that allows teaching in English," Professor Boaz Golani, dean of the Technion's Faculty of Industrial Engineering and Management, told Anglo File. The institution is currently creating additional programs in English, including for bachelor's degrees.

"It's not a show of no-confidence in Hebrew," Golani said. "English is the language of today's business world. We cannot shut our eyes and adopt a provincial outlook that builds walls making it harder for our graduates to take the Israeli economy forward."

Golani says anyone who feels that switching to
English isn't Zionist enough should realize that the move could help attract Jews to immigrate to Israel.

"Young Jews from abroad - particularly from the East Coast - are among our primary target audiences," he said. According to Golani, the Technion is working with the United Jewish Communities and the Jewish Agency to draw potential candidates. "Maybe they'll stay here after their studies," Golani said.

To increase the chance of that happening, the Technion will set up an ulpan program and enrichment courses. The institution, the Jewish Agency and the government will also work to offer the students holiday programs including hikes and trips.

"We are proud to be a Zionist-Israeli institution, but we must remember that this organization enjoys massive support from Jews in the Diaspora and especially from the U.S." Golani said. "We have a moral duty to both cater to them and encourage immigration. If we do it through an academic degree, then that's a win-win situation, as they say in English."