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Shifting Dynamics in the Eastern Mediterranean: The Developing Relationship Between Greece and Israel

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In the two years from 2009 to 2011, Greece has gone from being one of the European countries most critical of Israel to being one of the most supportive. This transition has progressed just as ties between Israel and Turkey have deteriorated. Strategic cooperation in the areas of military, the economy, and energy are rapidly developing in concert with exchanges of leaders and diplomats. In many ways it seems that Greece is a second-best ally for Israel, a small consolation to Israel at the loss of a good relationship with Turkey. Though Greece’s relative value to Israel may be questionable, a careful examination of the history and possibilities of a relationship between Greece and Israel will show that the bilateral relationship between Greece and Israel has the potential to be stronger and more enduring than the once-promising relationship between Israel and Turkey had been.

Setting the Stage: Greece, Turkey, and Cyprus

The relations among Greece, Israel, and Turkey cannot be productively examined without an understanding of the dynamic among Greece, Turkey, and Cyprus. The rivalry between Greece and Turkey is one of the oldest in the world between neighboring nations. The two countries have been in a state of détente since 1999 and are mutually committed to a settlement of their issues, but attempts have not been successful. The current issues that define their relationship are the divided island of Cyprus and territory disputes in the Aegean. Turkey has occupied the northern portion of the island of Cyprus since it invaded in 1974 in response to a Greek-backed military coup. The Republic of Cyprus is the only internationally recognized government on the island. The thirty-six percent
of the island that is occupied by Turkey is governed by the Republic of Northern Cyprus, a government recognized only by Turkey. Despite many efforts to resolve the conflict on Cyprus, the island remains divided. Cyprus is a prominent factor in the foreign policies of both Greece and Turkey.

The dispute in the Aegean concerns the delimitation of territorial waters and airspace surrounding the many small Greek islands scattered throughout the sea. According to the United Nations Convention Law of the Sea, which Greece has signed but Turkey has not, a country is entitled to full control of an area that extends twelve nautical miles from its coastline. Currently, Greece and Turkey claim territorial waters at six nautical miles. If Greece claimed the full twelve miles, much of the Aegean, including portions very near to Turkey’s coast, would be in Greek control. Turkey feels that this claim would give Greece disproportionate control over the waters and airspace and has stated that if Greece were to extend its territorial waters to twelve nautical miles that would be cause for war. Greece is concerned that Turkey will try to establish a zone of influence in the center of the Aegean that would cut off the Greek islands from the mainland. This dispute is one aspect of a larger Greek fear: that Turkey is working to establish itself as a regional hegemon and will try to halt the geopolitical and economic advances of Cyprus (Dokos).

The rivalry between Greece and Turkey is a defining aspect of the countries’ respective foreign policies. Both states continuously seek to raise support for their positions on the issues of Cyprus and Aegean from the United States, the United Nations, and the broader international community. The Turkish and Greek relationships with Israel have played into this strategy in different ways throughout their recent histories and have become an increasingly important part of the dynamic in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The Foundations of Cooperation: Greek-Israeli and Turkish-Israeli ties in the Years 1949–1990

Prior to these recent developments, the relationship between Greece and Israel was historically cool and distant. After Greece officially recognized the state of Israel in 1949, diplomatic representation between the two states remained at the level of chargé d’affaires—not at the level of ambassador—for forty years. The two states were not hostile, but they remained detached. Throughout these years, a strong pro-Palestinian position among Greek leadership and peoples, as well as a heavy dependence upon Arab oil and a desire for Arab support in the UN on the Cyprus issue, led Athens to court the Arab states rather than foster relations with Israel. During this time Greece believed that positive relations with Arab states would be economically beneficial (Athanassopoulou).

In 1981, Greece became a member of the Economic Community (EC). Membership in the EC encouraged Greece to normalize relations with Israel. As did Turkey at this time, then-Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou, who had been very publicly pro-Palestinian, began to view the American-Jewish lobby as a potential avenue through which to gain support in Washington on the Cyprus and Aegean issues and attract potential investors. In 1988, Athens upgraded diplomatic relations with Israel, and in 1990, under the leadership of the center-right party New Democracy, Greece was the last member of the EC to offer de jure recognition to Israel. The Arab-Israeli peace talks at the time facilitated the increased recognition: they heightened the legitimacy of the Israeli state in the eyes of the Greek populace and made it easier for Greek leaders to respond to negative reactions from both their constituents and the Arab states. The potential support of the American-Jewish lobby on the Cyprus issue, as well as the opportunities for investment and the chance to counter Turkey, remained an important objective in Athens and was a strong factor in the decision for Athens to sign a military accord with Israel in 1994. The military accord, which was signed under PASOK, the center-left party of Andreas Papandreou, never came to fruition because of pressures from both Syria and the members of PASOK, who were not supportive of developing ties with Israel. Thus, the Greek-Israeli relationship remained fairly stagnant until the end of the decade (Athanassopoulou).

The Turkish-Israeli relationship also did not begin with a promising start. Turkey was the only Muslim state to recognize Israel in 1949, though the two states remained distant. In the
1980s, relations warmed between the states as Turkish leadership pursued improved relations with the U.S. Turkey believed a relationship with Israel would foster this movement. Turkey lacked a significant diaspora in the United States and thus needed a strategy for garnering support in Congress. Turkey wanted to prevent Congress from using the word genocide to describe the massacre and deportation of Armenians after World War I and also sought support in Congress on the issue of the divided island of Cyprus. For Turkey, a relationship with the American-Jewish lobby was a means of gaining a voice and a form of representation in Congress. The cooperation was successful, and the relationship between Turkey and Israel flourished. The U.S. encouraged efforts by the two states in hopes that a strategic alliance might be formed that would alter the balance of power in the Middle East. Turkey was the primary actor in this situation, with the United States providing support and motivation.

Greece’s decision to upgrade diplomatic relations with Israel in the late 1980s was made partially in response to the expanding cooperation between Turkey and Israel. Greece previously was not interested because it viewed the situation as a “zero-sum game”: Turkey had the upper hand in the situation, so Greece believed it could not gain anything by developing ties with Israel. But, under Prime Minister Costas Simitis in the late 1990s, an expansion of U.S.-Greek ties encouraged improved relations with Israel. Foreign Ministry officials in the Simitis government further promoted the idea that a closer relationship between Greece and Israel would somehow prevent Israel and Turkey from continuing to expand ties so extensively. Of most interest to Greece were the purchases that Turkey was making from Israel to upgrade and modernize its weapons, as well as the joint air force training programs and the exchange of industrial technologies between the two states (Nachmani). Turkey was being strengthened through its military purchases and training from Israel; this new military relationship introduced an element of unpredictability into the region. Athens was concerned that an increase in military power and strategic cooperation with Israel would lead Turkey to feel more secure along its eastern border, which could result in increased Turkish aggression in the Aegean and a shift in the balance of power in the Eastern Mediterranean. Athens was also concerned that this cooperation would elevate Turkey to a position of stronger regional importance for the U.S. and that Turkey would gain the support of the American-Jewish lobby (Athanassopoulou).

In addition to working to prevent a deepening of the Turkish-Israeli relationship, the Simitis government sought to become more integrated into the European Union (EU); one strategy to this end was to align itself more fully with the EU in foreign policy matters. Athens therefore began creating a more specific policy toward Israel, which was facilitated by the election of Ehud Barak in 1999. Barak was considered more open to dialogue with Palestine (Hadjistassou).

Greek-Israeli trade increased substantially throughout the 1990s: by 2004, Israel was importing $242 million from Greece, and Greece was importing $142 million from Israel. There was also an increase in Israeli tourism to Greece. Israeli President Moshe Katsav declared Greece an important economic partner and a gateway to the Balkans (Damiras).

Israel was also interested in improving relations with Greece. Athens had reacted negatively to the publicity surrounding the strengthening of relations between Israel and Turkey in 1996. Israel did not want to alienate Greece, and therefore Cyprus as well, primarily because doing so would violate Israeli foreign policy, which advocates good relations with every state. And although Turkey was an important player in the Middle East, Greece was an access point to the EU, both as an air route and a potential supporter. Israel had not yet been successful in gaining widespread favor in the EU and considered EU financial assistance crucial to achieving peace in the region. Though its relationship with Turkey was paramount and forming a strategic partnership with Greece was not a priority, Israel nonetheless sought bilateral relations with Athens through trade and economic cooperation (Athanassopoulou).

**The Development and Deterioration of Israeli-Turkish Relations**

In the late 1990s, Turkey and Israel continued to develop their relationship by signing
military cooperation and free-trade agreements. These accords signaled the start of cooperation between Turkey and Israel. They contained contracts for the sale of Israeli military equipment and weapons to Turkey as well as the use of Turkish airspace in exchange for Israeli training in advanced warfare. The growth of the relationship between Turkey and Israel at this time focused on military collaboration and primarily benefitted the Turkish military, which was effectively running the country. The ruling party, forced by the military to cooperate, did not support the developing relationship; nor did the Turkish populace, which had long been pro-Palestinian (Barkey).

The Turkish-Israeli relationship expanded to include economic cooperation, the creation of Qualified Industrial Zones, and search and rescue operations. As a result of the partnership, Turkey was able to obtain quality military equipment from Israel and demonstrate to the U.S. that it was an important partner in the region. The continued relationship with Israel effectively served as evidence for this advancement. Turkey was also able to gain the support of the American-Jewish lobby in Congress (Barkey). The military agreements between Turkey and Israel were of great value to the Israeli defense industry. Israel benefitted from the use of Turkish airspace for training—an exigency because Israeli airspace is so narrow and the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) relies on air power. It also enjoyed the political significance of training in Turkey, a predominantly Muslim country with extensive partnerships and networks throughout the Arab world. The major benefit to Israel, however, was the close connection to a state that has such cultural and historic ties in the Middle East (Nachmani).

The cooperation between Turkey and Israel had potential to be strong and productive. An economic and military partnership between two democratic and economically strong states could bring stability to a region marked by authoritarian governments. Turkey could potentially act as a mediator or even become a local hegemon with which Israel could be comfortable (Barkey). Both states could benefit economically from the increase in trade (Nachmani).

After a promising beginning, relations between Turkey and Israel began a rapid deterioration following the Gaza War in 2008. The Turks abandoned their efforts to maintain strong relations and began speaking out with strong rhetoric against Israel. In May 2010, Israel intercepted a Turkish flotilla bound for Gaza, and, in the process, nine Turkish activists were killed. This event effectively terminated the era of Turkish-Israel cooperation. In the fall of 2011, the Israeli ambassador was expelled from Turkey. Military and defense deals were suspended. Prime Minister Erdogan of Turkey began using increasingly harsh rhetoric against Israel, even publicly humiliating the Israeli leader on stage at Davos. The rhetoric was well-received in Turkey but, as it continued to escalate, incited warnings from the international community. The rift in their relationship would not be easily overcome.

The rapid decline of such a promising partnership was possible because it had been formed at the highest levels of the Turkish state and the Israeli government. The relationship was based on cooperation between the military leadership of the two states. When the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in Turkey, it began to rein in the power of the military and had little incentive to continue the partnership. The relationship never had strong domestic support in Turkey, whose citizens tend to support Palestine and distrust Israel. Harsh anti-Israeli rhetoric by AKP leadership was thus well-received by the Turkish populace (Barkey).

An important factor in the deterioration of ties between Turkey and Israel is that their relationship was never truly bilateral; rather, it was formed as more of a triangular relationship among Turkey, the United States, and Israel, with Turkey being the primary actor and driver. Turkey had pursued a relationship with Israel with the goal of becoming a more important partner to the U.S. and garnering support in the U.S. Congress. The U.S. eagerly supported the relationship. The growth of its economy as well as its progression along the path to EU membership had led Turkey to become a strong regional power. Turkey's strategic location, as well as its ties to the Middle East and economic and military strength, led it to feel less dependent upon Israel and the American-Jewish lobby to show the United States that it was an important regional ally (Barkey).

Though the Turkish-Israeli relationship seemed to hold a great deal of potential for
collaboration and cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean, the lack of domestic support in Turkey and the increasing strength and confidence of Turkey made the relationship weaker than it appeared. This weakness allowed the Turkish leadership to quickly halt the development of ties with Israel in the wake of the Gaza War and the flotilla crisis.

A New Era of Strategic Cooperation between Greece and Israel

As the Turkish-Israeli relationship deteriorated, Greece eagerly moved to fill the gap. Though Athens maintains that improved relations with Israel should not be seen as competitive to relations with any other state, both Greek and Israeli leaders have acknowledged that the weakening of the Turkish-Israeli relationship made way for the Greek-Israeli relationship to develop (Bushinsky). Greece hoped that the break between Israel and Turkey would decrease Turkey’s support in Washington. Thus, the years from 2009 to 2012 have seen a rapid increase of cooperation between Greece and Israel. This new era of cooperation began in 2009 with communication between Prime Ministers Binyamin Netanyahu and George Papandreou and has expanded to include a wide array of diplomatic visits, military agreements, and civilian cooperation.

After the Gaza flotilla incident, the two states exchanged diplomatic visits. In July 2010, Papandreou made an official visit to Jerusalem. The following month Netanyahu became the first Israeli Prime Minister to visit Greece. He described cooperation between the two states as “natural,” stating that the visit would fix a 62-year-old abnormality (Hoffman). During this visit, Papandreou and Netanyahu discussed the expansion of strategic ties and greater cooperation between their militaries and related industries. This cooperation materialized a few months later, in October, when Israeli and Greek air forces trained jointly over Greek airspace. At this time, the two states signed the Aviation Treaty, the first treaty signed by the two countries since 1952. In January 2011, Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman made a visit to Athens and set up a joint committee for strategic security cooperation to work together on anti-terror issues. Finally, on September 4th of 2011, Greek Defense Minister Panagiotis Beglitis and Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak signed a security cooperation agreement. The leaders cited the difficult times that both Israel and Greece were experiencing and the importance of cooperation. Barak stated, “We are seeing with satisfaction the deepening and widening of relations between us and the Greeks in all sectors, including the security sector, and we desire to see the deepening and widening of this cooperation between the governments, between the Defense Ministries and between our peoples” (JTA). That same month Greece created a legal framework that allows Jews born in Greece in or before 1945 to reclaim Greek, and thus EU, citizenship. This agreement affects only 350 people but is a symbolic gesture of inclusion by the Greeks (Tziampiris).

In 2011, a second flotilla of ships attempted to leave a Greek port for Gaza. Greek inspectors banned the vessels from leaving the port, following a close interpretation of the law. One vessel left anyway and was pursued by Greek speedboats. This was a risky move for Greek officials, but they were able to force the vessel to return. The Greeks were praised by the U.S., the UN, the EU, Israel, and the Palestinian Authority (Tziampiris). The budding relationship was able to withstand an international crisis, and Greece demonstrated that Israel is now a priority for Greek leaders (Athanassopoulou).

Greece has rushed to fill in the gap created when Turkey ceased cooperation with Israel. In many ways, however, Greece cannot fill that gap. Greece has long maintained a relationship with the Arab world, but it is not nearly as strong as Turkey’s. Even in the best economic situation, Greece would not be able to make such large weapons purchases from Israel as did Turkey; currently, Greece is not in a position to purchase weapons, equipment, or defense technology. Compared to the Turkish population of 63 million, the Greek population of 12 million represents a significantly smaller non-military market as well (Bushinsky). Though Greece cannot provide Israel with all of the benefits it received from its relationship with Turkey, Israel does seek to gain in some ways. Cooperation with Greece in the exploitation of the natural gas recently
discovered in the Eastern Mediterranean will enhance Israel’s strategic position in gas field exploitation and EEZ delimitation (Damiras). The Greek and Israeli armed forces have begun cooperation, and Israel is able to use Greek airspace for training purposes. Greece is farther from Israel than Turkey, so the IDF can carry out long-range flights (Iserovich). Now that Israel and Turkey are no longer cooperating, Israel also has an interest in counterbalancing Turkey’s power in the Eastern Mediterranean. Finally, a strong partnership with an EU member state can help to alleviate any isolation that Israel may be feeling after losing a strong partner in the international community. Greece can potentially help to improve diplomatic and trade relations between Israel and the EU (Damiras).

Greece stands to benefit from a relationship with Israel in a variety of ways aside from the oft-cited connection with the American-Jewish lobby. The Greek army has received military training and expertise from the IDF. The militaries have practiced joint air maneuvers, combat search and rescue missions, and long-range combat missions. During Netanyahu’s visit to Israel, the leaders discussed coordinating intelligence strategies, sharing sensitive intelligence data, and collaborating in high-level strategic sessions. Cooperation with Israel also furthered Papandreou’s goal of strengthening Greece’s image as a regional peace negotiator. Greek leaders have cited their historic ties with the Arab world and experience with conflict and splits as an asset to the peace process. Involvement in the peace process can help to bolster Greek prestige even during the economic crisis and the resulting tension with the EU (Beck).

Cultural and Civilian Ties between Greece and Israel

In promoting their developing relationship in the news media and public appearances, leaders of both Greece and Israel have been drawing upon the cultural ties between the two states. These ties were easily ignored by leaders during times of cooler relations—they are not politically salient enough to actually inspire cooperation—but leaders have been utilizing these cultural ties to create an image of a culturally similar, if not quite shared, past.

The common experiences of the Greek and Israeli peoples that are being highlighted by political leadership extend far back in history, to a time when both peoples were creators and disseminators of culture. Both nations feel a strong sense of pride for their cultural contributions and historic achievements. Leaders have been broadly discussing the shared values of the two nations based on their similar cultural histories. The Greek and Jewish peoples were both subjugated by the Ottomans and managed to influence the economic life of the Ottoman Empire (Damiras). The peoples also share a more recent history of suffering under the Nazis: Greece was briefly occupied by the Nazis and fought against them, whereas Turkey remained neutral until the end of WWII (Bushinsky). Currently, both the Israeli and Greek peoples have very large international diasporas, especially within the United States. These diasporas are very connected to events and issues of national interest in their respective homelands and are politically active in their current homes as well. Cooperation between the two diasporas can be mutually beneficial both for local concerns as well as concerns of national interest. Greece and Israel held a joint diaspora conference in May 2011 to foster cooperation among diaspora groups. The developing relationship between the two states has allowed Greece to court the American-Jewish Diaspora more actively. In 2010, Greece hosted the Conference for the Presidents of Major American-Jewish Organizations. Greece continues to seek support from these organizations on the Cyprus issue and is especially interested at present in encouraging investment. Greek leaders have regularly come to visit with American-Jewish organizations whenever they visit the U.S.

Greece and Israel also share important religious ties. The Greek Orthodox community has a strong interest in Israeli holy sites, and many Greek Orthodox pilgrims visit Israel each year during religious holidays. The Patriarchate of the Greek Orthodox Church is the second largest landowner in Israel after the state itself. Religion is an important part of the culture of both Greece and Israel and can serve as a powerful and convenient building block for collaboration among citizens.

In addition to the cultural ties between the two states, economic ties are also being
developed. Most immediate has been the rise in Israeli tourism to Greece, which increased by 200 percent between 2009 and 2010, and by an additional 15 percent in 2011. In recent years, Greece has replaced Turkey as a popular destination for many Israeli tourists. The two states are also working on an Israel-Greece tourism package to promote to tourists (Tziampiris). Greece hopes to attract Israeli investment at both the public and private sectors. Leaders have also cited cooperation in agriculture and desalination. In 2008, Greece imported $221.4 million worth of products from Israel; by 2011 this number had increased to $263.5 million. Israeli exports to Cyprus jumped from $68.7 million in 2008 to $318.9 million in 2011 (State of Israel).

Greek leaders are actively promoting this cooperation to the Greek and Israeli publics. In 2010, the Greek government invited Israeli journalists to a series of meetings held among high-ranking Greek and Israeli officials specifically to highlight the level of bilateral historical ties (Beck). The fact that leaders can conjure such a memory for their citizens may be a critical difference in the relationship between Greco-Israeli and Turko-Israeli relationships. The process of drawing upon common cultural experience was not possible with Turkey. Turkey is a predominantly Muslim nation with extensive contacts throughout the Arab world, which was politically beneficial but prevented the type of cultural-inclusivity rhetoric that is now creating a foundation of support among the peoples of Greece and Israel. Even after years of close military, economic, and political cooperation between Israel and Turkey, Turkish leadership was quickly able to draw popular support away from Israel.

The process of creating the image of a common cultural experience is crucial to gaining the support of the Greek and Israeli publics for cooperation between the two states. By creating a picture of similarity between the Greek and Israeli communities, both states are beginning a process of inclusion that will help prevent cultural “othering” in the future. The Greek-Israeli relationship will go deeper than economic exchanges and military cooperation: they are involving their citizens in building a foundation of shared culture and historical experience.

Natural Gas in the Eastern Mediterranean

The natural gas that has recently been discovered in the Eastern Mediterranean off the coasts of Israel and Cyprus is providing opportunities and incentives for increased military and economic cooperation among Israel, Greece, and Cyprus. The Tamar Field, off the coast of Israel, contains an estimated 300 billion cubic meters (BCM) of natural gas, which would be enough to supply Israel’s domestic needs for approximately twenty years, during which time the estimated gas requirement of the country is 15 BCM per year. Tamar will begin supplying Israel with gas in 2013. The Leviathan field contains an estimated 500 BCM, which could be available for export. This field extends into forty square miles of Cyprus’s Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), and may contain as much as eight trillion cubic feet of natural gas (Brodet). The original estimate of the gas discovered off the coast of Cyprus in Lot 12 came to $400 billion worth, at potentially 11 trillion cubic feet, which could make Cyprus energy independent for 200 years (Abdel-Kader).

Turkey has been very opposed to this gas exploration and threatened that, if Noble Energy proceeded with drilling, the company would not be permitted to do business in Turkey. The company continued drilling in cooperation with Israeli companies. In August 2011, the Turkish Foreign Minister condemned Cyprus as violating international law, though Cyprus’s action is supported by many in the international community. Turkey has not found international support for its opposition (Tziampiris), and exploration has continued.

Greece, Israel, and Cyprus have been cooperating to ensure the secure exploitation and successful distribution of these resources. Greece may serve as a safe outlet for Israeli natural gas and a hub through which it can be transported to the EU, an immediate market for gas exports. Israel had been considering laying a land pipeline through Turkey to the EU, but with such tense relations a pipeline through Greece is a more secure option. Though this option is more secure, it is less energy efficient, so Israel has been considering building a natural gas liquefaction plant on Cyprus as an alternative. Once the gas is in liquid form it can be
more efficiently transported to the EU. Such a role in the energy system would greatly benefit Cyprus, which would gain both regional importance and geopolitical leverage. This gas could help diversify the European energy supply, which is primarily comprised of Russian natural gas, and thereby increase European energy security (Hadjistassou). Greece stands to benefit by becoming an energy hub, and Israel would gain importance as a European partner.

Another option for Israel is to export gas to Asia, where demand for energy is high. Exporting gas to Asia would be possible only with the construction of special liquefaction facilities, which would be costly but might be justified by the high price of gas in the growing Asian market. Israeli entrepreneurs are currently weighing these options and working with Cyprus to develop this project. The natural gas discovery has provided a shared strategic interest among Cyprus, Israel, and Greece (Brodet).

Greece, Cyprus, and Israel have begun to coordinate political and military actions as well as energy exploration activities. This loose alliance is a threat to the dominance that Turkey has enjoyed in the Eastern Mediterranean, and Turkey has interfered with Cypriot exploration of its sea bed. As the three states continue to coordinate energy and military activities, the loose alliance grows stronger. This coordination has the potential to extend and develop as energy is extracted from the region for many years to come. The successful exploitation of the gas will require close cooperation among Greece, Israel, and Cyprus, and the economic and political benefits will provide a strong incentive for positive relations well into the future.

Moving Forward

The Turkish-Israeli relationship was formed at the highest levels of government and thus was vulnerable to changes in political leadership. The Greek-Israeli relationship also began at the highest levels of power and benefitted from a close relationship between Prime Ministers Netanyahu and Papandreou. Greek leadership, however, sought to make a relationship with Israel a permanent part of Greek foreign policy, and both primary political parties, PASOK and New Democracy, supported the relationship. Greek leaders built support among the Greek populace by developing opportunities for business and civilian collaboration and drawing upon shared cultural experience of the Greek and Jewish peoples. The Greek government has reached out to American-Jewish organizations and successfully formed relationships with them. Unlike the relationship between Turkey and Israel, which was formed only at the highest levels of government without public support, relations between Greece and Israel are the comprehensive result of a coordinated effort among multiple sectors and primary Greek political parties. The work done by Greek and Israeli leadership to promote this relationship will enable the current atmosphere of collaboration to endure succeeding administrations.

The change in Greek leadership in the fall of 2011 could have posed a threat to the new partnership, but before Papandreou stepped down in the fall, Israeli leaders had already begun cultivating ties with New Democracy. Soon after Papandreou left office, Israeli ambassador to Greece Aryeh Mekel sent a cable to the Foreign Ministry that stressed the importance of “continuing Papandreouism without Papandreou” (Keinon). Both Greek and Israeli leaders have made strong relations a policy that extends beyond specific administrations. Since the transition government has come to power, diplomatic visits between the two states have continued.

The warming of the Greek-Israeli relationship has brought a new dynamic to the Eastern Mediterranean. Though it has largely been the result of the deterioration of the Israeli-Turkish relationship, and though Greece cannot quite fill the gap left by Turkey in Israel’s foreign politics, the relationship offers its own array of mutual benefits, such as military, business, and energy cooperation. The exploitation of natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean will provide a strong incentive for cooperation. The relationship has proven strong enough to survive international incidents and a change of Greek administration and shows great promise that it will continue to thrive and develop.
REFERENCES


