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CONTEMPORARY EASTERN AND SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

“The transnational relations between Israel and Greece”

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ABSTRACT

Beginning my research on the subject, I would like to extend on the issue, providing to the reader, a more specific and exact view. First of all, the incentive for my thesis was the unstable and very changeable environment that exists at the heart of the south-eastern Mediterranean. The alliances, the disputes, the diplomatic relations and- generally speaking- the activities at a national level - are of great importance for the field of International Relations.

One of these relations, which seem to be lately very interesting at the region, is that between the states of Greece and Israel. It is a very promising relation according to many scientists and researchers, which is linked to a broader framework. The new “triangle alliance” formed among Israel, Cyprus and Greece.

My main idea, writing my thesis lies on the cooperation in geostrategic policy, industrial activity, international commerce, military action, tourist development and cultural linkages between the two nation-states.

The importance of the examined issue is much wider for the international community, if we notice carefully the late incidents at the dispute between Israel and the Palestinian authority. And the last vote for the statehood of the Palestine.

Furthermore, I want to present mainly the incorrect view given by the majority of the Greek mass media. To be more specific, during the last decades there is a narrative that is strongly pre-Arabic and is partial to the Palestinian authority. My thesis tries to work as a recommendation, which seeks for a more safe and real information at the issue. And I strongly believe that the Greek state should follow a path of further cooperation and development with Israel. That could be very beneficial for the national security and prosperity for both nations and their people.

Introduction

Two nations that have been constantly active in world's history since antiquity are the Greek and Jewish one. These two nations have inexorably been associated with all the historical developments in the Mediterranean region and with active to every worldwide event worth mentioning. It would be interesting to illustrate that these two great nations have quite a few common elements as regarding to their history of national fulfillment and their aspirations in various historical periods.

The Jewish Zionist movement that was founded in the late 19th century by Theodor Herzl had a significant historical analogy with the then "Grand Idea" of the Greek independent state. The Greek as well as the Jewish Diaspora was split in those that promoted the inclusion of all members of each nationality into a single nation state; and to those that had great economic and social interests and firmly believed that such a move would impair their live hood. The strong Jewish community in the Ottoman Empire feared that a newborn Jewish state would destroy –as it happened- centuries of constructing extensive commercial networks in an area from Danube to Egypt. (Research Institute for European and American Studies, AN OUTLINE OF GREEK-ISRAELI STRATEGIC RELATIONS)

Greek and Jewish nationalism though had made considerable gains by aligning themselves. The period between 1878- 1881 during the Berlin Congresses the British Prime Minister Disraeli –and a fervent supporter of a Jewish homeland- agreed to a partial disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, where Greece acquired the Thessaly area and expanded considerably its borders further North.

This period was a turning point to the British policy of stabilizing the Ottomans and signaled the future end of the Sultans rule in the Balkans. To this point it is remarkable to add that the most supportive of the Ottoman Empire where Greek and Jewish Ottoman subjects who clearly were anxious of losing their tremendous economic power and privileges should the Empire collapsed as it finally happened.

After the recognition of the state of Israel -1948- and until 1991, Greece viewed Israel as an antagonist force in the Eastern Mediterranean basin. Consequently a more pro Arab stance followed, that reflected amongst others the anxiety of the dependency Greece had on import of crude oil from Arab countries which had in plenty of instances proceed in an embargo against the West. Still, largely for strategic reasons, Israel and Turkey maintained fairly close relations while the interaction

between Israel and Greece was minimal. Over the years, Greek relations with Israel have been complicated by the rivalry between Greece and Turkey and in an essence creating a triangular relation that was characterized by the adversary between Greece vs. Turkey; the cooperation between Turkey and Israel, and the lukewarm relations between Greece and Israel. ((Strengthening Greek-Israeli ties (July 2012))

Greek-Israeli relations were stagnant for almost 45 years, while Greece was pursuing the unification with Cyprus. In the 1990's, Greece signed a defense cooperation agreement with Israel. This new relation was in progress, while Greece has traditionally been supportive of the Palestinians and generally pre- Arab, as the central-left governments of the 1980's (PASOK), have expressed in the Greek people the previous years. It is very indicative, that since 1995 relations between Greece and Israel improved due to the decline of Israeli-Turkish relations under the AK Party of prime Minister Erdogan. So, because of that Greece was in desire to increase its deterrent power against Turkey, and especially after the death of Andreas Papandreu (PASOK), was seeking for improvement among to the relations with the USA. A new environment was ready, up to that point for further relations and more close contacts for the next years.

In August 2010, PM Netanyahu became the first Israeli Prime Minister to visit Greece. On his two-day tour, PM Netanyahu discussed with Greek PM George Papandreu the possibility of expanding strategic ties and establishing greater cooperation between the nations' militaries and related industries. Israel was keen to expand ties with Greece since its relations with Turkey soured following the Gaza flotilla incident in May 2010. David Harris The executive director of the New York-based American Jewish Committee (AJC) signified the reasons of a strategic partnership between Greece and Israel **“Both countries’ leaders use the term “strategic partnership” today to describe the link. Both countries are robust democracies and also share common concerns in the Eastern Mediterranean, where the Arab upheaval has called into question vital issues of stability and security. Both countries see energy issues emerging as an important dimension of the relationship and have much in common on a human level.¹”** The development of Greece-Israel relations is a cause for great satisfaction and offers the potential for wide-ranging synergies, win-win partnerships and significant bilateral advantages.

¹ Ekathimini.com: Strengthening Greek-Israeli ties (July 2012) by Tom Ellis, interview of David Harris.

The two countries, though small in size, can have a big impact on regional development and enjoy multiple growth benefits. The following years till nowadays led to a further partnership in the Greek – Israeli relations in all levels. The extend of the partnership is going to be examined and analyzed by dividing it into the sectors involved, the role of Cyprus, which is a country that with its contribution an alliance formed, of the triangle “Greece – Israel – Cyprus” as well as policies from neighboring countries involved. (Greek-Israel Relations, John M. Nomikos (Updated March 2012)) (Greece, Israel: Small countries that can have a big impact (September 2012))

1. Geostrategic policy

a) Cyprus

Cyprus' sudden improved relations with Israel - at a time when most other European Union members are turning a cold shoulder - are not the exclusive result of chilled relations between Israel and Turkey. **"I am not interested in basing our relations on the troubles between Turkey and Israel"** Christofias said. **"Both countries have enough interests in common and enough good will to create a foundation for welcome future activity."**² Observers in Cyprus say the key to the improving relations lies in those common interests - among them, what is referred to as "the division of the sea and its treasures" between the two countries - and in the belief that Israel's good relations with Washington will rub off in some magical way on the island. The Cypriots are making no secret of their enthusiasm over the natural-gas reserves discovered off Israel's coast, or of their desire to be partners in converting them into an efficient energy source as soon as possible. **"Cypriots are industrious, progressive people who understand business and work, and are ready to devote every effort to cooperate in this field and others,"**² Christofias declared. Minister of Commerce, Industry and Tourism Antonis Paschalides also aspires to advance the rapidly emerging cooperation - economic and also strategic - and to anchor it in

² HAARETZ: Friends on the East-West seam (March 2011) by Avirama Golan, interview with President Dimitris Christofias.

formal agreements. With the sincerity characteristic of Cypriots, Paschalides notes that with all the enthusiasm, however, Cyprus cannot ignore Israeli tourism and real estate projects in the island's north, which is under disputed Turkish control. Christofias has no problem talking warmly about generations of ties between Israel and the Cypriots, while also expressing sympathy for the suffering of the Palestinians. It is easier for him to speak this way as the leader of the Communist Party, which won more than 30 percent of the vote in his country's last elections. **"I am not intervening in Israel's internal politics,"** he said, **"but we on the left definitely have something to offer you. We played a historic role in the fight for human rights, workers' rights and equal rights for women. The public also remembers our underground fight against the Nazis and against British colonialism, and I take pride in the fact that we recognized Israel's right to independence from the outset and helped Holocaust survivors immigrate there. In this sense, we can definitely talk about a historic alliance."**³ Naturally, the president does not want to talk about Israel's right wing, preferring to discuss the counterpart in his country. **"The extreme right has labeled us animals. But communists are people and they operate on behalf of people. The extreme right in Cyprus caused terrible damage to the country and to society,"**³ he noted. In his three years as president, and particularly since the Turkish Cypriots hardened their position to the point where it is doubtful that the few talks will lead to anything, he has tried to foment minor but saliently socialist changes in Cyprus' liberal economic structure. He has increased pensions for the elderly by 30 percent, made subsidized water available to all (naturally, Israeli companies are in charge of the country's vigorous desalination project), and more. **"But the EU will not let us implement many things,"**³ he complained. (Greek-Cypriot-Israeli "energy axis" (March 2012)) (Cyprus, Greece and Israel: a new alliance? (May 2012))

b) Palestine

Hamas is the largest and most influential Palestinian militant movement that, along with the more moderate Fatah party, serves as one of the two primary

³ HAARETZ: Friends on the East-West seam (March 2011) by Avirama Golan, interview with President Dimitris Christofias.

Palestinian political factions. Founded in 1987 during the first Intifada, Hamas is a Sunni Islamist group and a U.S.-designated Foreign Terrorist Organization violently opposed to the state of Israel. Hamas, an acronym for Harakat al-Muqawana al-Islamiya (Islamic Resistance Movement), has exercised de facto rule over the Gaza Strip since wresting the territory from its rival Fatah, which governs the West Bank, in 2007. The two parties have made overtures of reconciliation in the wake of the Arab Spring revolutions, but progress on this score has proved elusive. Despite its militant reputation, Hamas' local support, in many ways, can be traced to its extensive network of on-the-ground social programming, including food banks, schools, and medical clinics. Hamas is viewed by most Western analysts as an obstacle to the Arab-Israeli peace process and the goal of a two-state solution. As a result, Western nations, including the United States, have tried to embolden the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority while isolating Hamas, which has historically kept strong ties to Iran. However, direct Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations have been frozen since 2010, and the outbreak of hostilities between Israel and Hamas (NYT) in Gaza in late 2012 threatens to erode the prospects for renewed talks anytime soon. (Council on Foreign Relations: Hamas (November 2012))

c) Syria

Syria is one of Israel's principal immediate military threats. Syria's primary military objective has been the destruction of Israel, but since it has been defeated on the battlefield by the IDF (Israel Defensive Force) in every major military engagement since 1948. In the last decade the country has turned to a new strategy: sponsor and assist terrorist organizations like Hamas and Hezbollah while also developing offensive, ballistic missile systems and proliferating weapons of mass destruction.

Since 2008, Syria has spent more than \$3 billion on weapons procurement and development, up from less than \$100 million in 2002. Syria also reportedly received \$1 billion from Iran in 2007/8 to buy surface-to-surface missiles, rockets, anti-tank missiles and anti-aircraft systems. **“Iran and Syria share the same viewpoint regarding regional issues and efforts will be made to strengthen our shared**

interests and bilateral relations,"⁴ said Hassan Turkmani, Syrian Defense Minister, who was dispatched to Tehran after Iranian officials condemned the resumption of negotiations with Israel in 2008. Israel is particularly concerned with a Syrian request from Russia for long-range S-300 surface-to-air missiles that could threaten IAF (Israel Air Forces) jets flying on the Israeli side of the Golan Heights. Syria also reportedly wants MiG 29 fighter jets and the Iskander surface-to-surface missile system, which is a longer range and more accurate missile than the ballistic missiles currently in Syria's arsenal. The Syrian navy is apparently also looking to purchase two Amur-1650 submarines from Russia. The dramatic increase in military spending and effort to significantly upgrade its military capability keeps Syria as a major threat to Israel.

The latest incident occurred in 3rd November when three Syrian tanks entered the demilitarized zone in the Golan Heights, Israel said, raising concerns violence from Syria's civil war could heat up a long-quiet frontier that has not seen such an incursion in nearly 40 years. Israel complained to U.N. peacekeepers present in the area, a relatively low-key response that suggested it did not see the Syrian armor as an immediate threat. But the entry marks the most serious spillover of Syria's turmoil to date at the frontier, where stray ordnance has exploded on the Israeli side in the past. Neighboring countries are dealing with a variety of incidents linked to the conflict — Turkey exchanged artillery fire with Syria for a week last month, while Jordan has seen several shootings at the border and clashes linked to the uprising against President Bashar Assad have broken out in Lebanon. Some in Israel worry that that if Assad goes, the country could fall into the hands of Islamic extremists or descend into sectarian warfare that would destabilizing the region. Islamic fighters — some from abroad — are increasingly taking part in key engagements alongside the rebels. Inside Syria on Saturday for example, Islamic militants took part in a dawn assault on a strategic airbase in the north of the country. The attack, reported by activists, aimed to disrupt strikes by government warplanes and helicopters that are pounding rebel-held towns. (Syrian tanks enter demilitarized Israeli frontier)

⁴ Ynet news: Syria says willing to up cooperation with Iran (May 2008) by Dudi Cohen, Syrian Defense Minister Hassan Turkmani

d) Iran

Iranian–Israeli relations have shifted from close ties between Israel and Iran during the era of the Pahlavi dynasty to hostility since the Islamic Revolution led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Iran has severed all diplomatic and commercial ties with Israel, and its government does not recognize Israel as a country and refers to its government as the "Zionist regime." The land is referred to by Iran as "Occupied territories." Due to recent rhetoric between Iran and Israel, development of nuclear technology, and funding of the groups Hamas and Hezbollah, tensions have risen between the State of Israel and the Islamic Republic of Iran, especially after the election of the hard-line Mahmud Ahmadinejad in 2005. Israelis believe the threat is best exemplified by Iran's hard-line president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who has repeatedly expressed his contempt for their country since taking office in 2005. Ahmadinejad has described the Holocaust as a myth and most famously, in 2006, was reported as saying he wanted to see Israel "**wiped off the map**"⁵. There were claims that the quote was inaccurate but either way he has shown little love towards Israel and has used threats towards the country to try to boost his popularity among Muslims angry at perceived injustices inflicted on the Palestinians. Israel's geographical proximity to Iran and the fact that it is so resented by the Muslim world – which Ahmadinejad still looks to for support despite most leaders' dislike of him - coupled with the military might of the US make Israel a much more likely target than America. The Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has said he is ready to order a strike on Iran if international sanctions do not stop its nuclear program. "**I am, of course, ready to press the button if necessary,**"⁶ he said. Speaking on Israeli television, Prime Minister Netanyahu also indicated Israel was prepared to act unilaterally. His government has failed to get the US to set a clear "red line" for military action against Iran. This has put a strain on relations with the administration of President Barack Obama. Channel Two interviewed the prime minister as part of an investigative report detailing Israel's efforts to stop Iran from what it says is a drive to develop a nuclear weapon. Iran insists its nuclear program is purely for peaceful

⁵ The Guardian: Explainer: Relations between Iran and Israel (September 2008) by Haroon Siddique

⁶ BBC News, Jerusalem: Israeli PM Netanyahu 'ready' to order strike on Iran (November 2012), by Yolande Knell

purposes. **"In the final reckoning, the responsibility lies with the prime minister and as long as I am prime minister, Iran will not have the atomic bomb," he said. "If there's no other way, Israel is ready to act."**⁷ There was also criticism of the handling of the Iranian nuclear threat from the former Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert. He suggested that the current government had jeopardized its close relationship with Washington. Mr. Olmert is considering making a political comeback ahead of a general election on 22 January. Like its US ally, Israel has consistently refused to rule out a military option to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear bomb. It believes such a weapon would threaten its existence. (Explainer: Relations between Iran and Israel (September 2008))

e) Russia

Russia has not always been a friendly alliance for Israel despite their latest support in October. The Russian Ambassador intervened, and the vote in favor of the latest ritualistic anti-Israel resolution, was delayed at least for half a year. This time it was presented by the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan over the situation of the Holy places in Jerusalem. Clearly the goal of the delay is to quietly remove this artificial issue from the agenda of UNESCO. As the Soviets supported the UN Partition Plan in November 1947, and moved later to recognize the newly-established State of Israel, and also to supply it with much-needed arms in its war of independence, given by their then satellite state of Czechoslovakia. But then, the Soviets changed horses, adopted the rising tide of radical Arab nationalism, led by Nasser of Egypt, and became Israel's worst enemy in the international arena. What helped them pursue this policy was also the fateful decision taken by Israel's first PM David Ben-Gurion to side with the US in the Korean War, much to the chagrin of a lot of left-wing Israelis, who considered themselves part of the international Socialist camp. That was then, but it all changed after 1990, and diplomatic relations first, and later thriving commercial relations, were established between the two countries, and in the background was the exodus of previously oppressed Soviet Jews to Israel, something which has had a profound impact on every facet of life in Israel, including its domestic politics.

⁷ BBC News, Jerusalem: Israeli PM Netanyahu 'ready' to order strike on Iran (November 2012), by Yolande Knell

President Vladimir Putin picked Israel for its first international visit after his recent election. What seemed to be a diplomatic fantasy years ago seemed almost natural in May of this year, as the Russian leader inaugurated a stature commemorating the fallen Soviet soldiers in the "Great War" against Nazi Germany, many of whom were Jews. During the visit, Putin had a long session with PM Netanyahu, the contents of which remained unknown, but not for too long. It has been published that the Russian natural gas, state-run monopoly Gazprom, which is the world's biggest natural gas exploration and Production Company, is very keen on investing a substantial amount in some of the newly-discovered natural gas resources off the shores of Israel. While the Netanyahu government is not in a position to decide all by itself whether to admit Gazprom as a senior partner in the new project, it sure does wield enough influence to enable the Russians to be involved. It is this possible partnership which arouses a lot of interest in the Middle East and could become the linchpin of a new strategic realignment in the Mediterranean. The Israeli plan is to incorporate Cyprus in the production of the gas and oil and the two countries have vastly improved their relations, even though the President of Cyprus is a member of the Communist Akel Party. There is possible profit to share in the background, but also a joint adversary, and this is Turkey under PM Erdogan and the AKP party, which have targeted Israel, since the tragic Mavi Marmara incident, as a rival country, and whose relations with Cyprus have been adversarial since the illegal Turkish creation of the Republic on Northern Cyprus in 1974. But then there is also the big shadow of Russia in the background. The Russians make it abundantly clear that they will not tolerate Turkish attempts to torpedo a joint Cypriot-Israeli project, as well as expressing growing impatience with other aspects of Turkish policy, not least the interception of planes flying from Russia to Syria. (Russia and Israel -- Beginning of a Great Friendship (October 2012))

While Russia and Turkey agreed in December 2011 to grant Gazprom permission to construct the South Stream pipeline project in the Turkish waters of the Black Sea, it is well-known that the Russians do not want to be too dependent on Turkey in terms of being able to export their gas and oil, so the option of taking part in the Israeli and Cypriot projects is highly appealing to them. It can and may very well prove also highly appealing to Israel, and could become the anchor of new, strategic relations between the two countries. Yes, Iran may prove a major stumbling block, and Russian objections to stricter sanctions against Iran are not popular in

Israel, to put it mildly; but the Russians are not in support of Iran developing nuclear weapons, and they are very sensitive about fundamentalist Islamic influences over their own Muslim population. It is clear therefore that Israel and Russia may have enough in common to further develop their relations and create a stable friendship based on a variety of interests. (The Times of Israel: Israel – Russia relations)

2. Industry

Greece, as a member of the European Union and the euro zone, offers wide-ranging opportunities for Israel to access European markets. In this part we are going to focus in the actions on behalf of each country to strengthen their industry sector and benefit from their partnership.

a) Greek Industry

Although the economy of Greece had improved in recent decades due to the industrial development and tourism, presently the country faces a large and severe economic crisis. The currency of Greece since 2002 is euro, which replaced drachma. Greece has a mixed capitalistic economy with a large public sector that accounts about half of GDP, a factor that is partly blamed for the slow economic growth. Greece is an agricultural country (with agricultural products such as wheat, corn, barley, sugar beets, olives, tomatoes, tobacco, potatoes, beef, dairy products and wine) with 20% of the workforce employed in this sector. 59% of the workforce is employed in the sector of services and the 21% in industry (food and tobacco processing, textiles, chemicals, metal products, mining and petroleum) and construction.

Greece industry sector has faced a lot of revamping with the vigorous shift towards industrialization. Manufacturing sector has, in fact, overtaken the agriculture sector in terms of contribution to the GDP. However the growth is unsettled by the increasing dependency on imports that have been a reason of concern for Greece. The imports in 2009 were \$61.47 billion in contrast to the exports of only \$18.64 billion. However, this cannot be undone because for the Greece industry to prosper, raw materials, machinery parts and fuel have to be imported.

In-house industries are rudimentary and have negligible production of iron and steel. Greece industries do not manufacture basic transport equipment, such as cars and trucks, due to shortage of skills, raw materials as well as infrastructural help. The

only region that features industries is Athens, which is a hot spot due to easier capital availability as well as connectivity.

The trend in Greece industries is to encourage privatization, while controlling basic industries such as electric power and petroleum refining. However, as the trend picks up, the portion of government controlled industries is decreasing and the government is divesting itself from the control in the telecommunications company, Olympic Airways and the OTE. (Greece Economy: Information about the Economy of Greece)

Between 2005 and 2011, Greece has had the highest percentage increase in industrial output compared to 2005 levels out of all 27 European Union members, with an increase of 6%. Euro-stat statistics show that the industrial sector was hit by the Greek financial crisis throughout 2009 and 2010, with domestic output decreasing by 5.8% and industrial production in general by 13.4%.

Since the fall of communism, Greece has invested heavily in neighboring Balkan countries. Between 1997 and 2009, 12.11% of foreign direct investment capital in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was Greek, ranking fourth. In 2009 alone, Greeks invested €380 million in the country, with companies such as Hellenic Petroleum having made important strategic investments. Greece invested €1.38 billion in Bulgaria between 2005 and 2007 and many important companies (including Bulgarian Postbank, United Bulgarian Bank Coca-Cola Bulgaria) are owned by Greek financial groups. In Serbia, 250 Greek companies are active with a total investment of over €2 billion. Romanian statistics from 2005 showed that Greek investment in the country exceeded €3 billion.

By the end of 2009, Greece had to face significant problems of the severe economic crisis like the high rate of unemployment, tax invasion and corruption of the political parties. As a result, the country received (April 2010) a large loan from the World Monetary Fund and the European Union. In exchange for this large bailout, the government announced combined spending cuts and tax increases on top of the tough austerity measures already taken. Greece is presently in debt that threatens the eurozone, yet the country has revealed an ambitious plan to fight tax evasion and raise revenues in the next couple of years in an attempt to further cut its budget deficit and win back market confidence. With a gradually rising rate of unemployment, Greece needs to invest in exports, business creations and agriculture to stand up, and at the same time pull back the Greek investors. The partnership with Israel has offered

suggestions, to which we will refer below, that Greece is need at this time and that could substantially improve the industry sector. (Encyclopedia of the Nations, Greece – Industry) (Greece Industry Sectors (March 2010))

b) Israeli Industry

Israel is today an industrialized country with most of its manufacturing, including many traditional fields, based on intensive and sophisticated research & development and hi-tech processes, tools, and machinery. This is the outcome of very rapid and intensive development. Israel owes its industrial success not to a vast supply of raw materials or natural resources, but rather to its highly qualified labor force. Israel's primary asset has always been its people, and this fact is proven more than anywhere else in the industrial sector.

During the past two decades Israel's industrial sector has made a major shift to the areas of medical electronics, agro-technology, telecommunications, fine chemicals, computer hardware and software, and diamond cutting and polishing. Israel's high-tech sector has burst onto the international scene, surpassing the output of many traditional leaders in this field. Most major US high-tech firms are now establishing or looking to establish offices and branches in Israel so as to feed on the talent pool Israel has to offer.

Israel's other primary industry is diamond cutting and polishing. In 1997 Israel produced roughly 80 percent of the world output of small polished stones, those used in jewelry settings. During the same period Israel was responsible for 40 percent of the total world output of diamonds of all shapes and sizes. These figures make Israel the world leader in diamond cutting and polishing in terms of production and marketing.

For companies interested in Investments in Israel, either in its emerging upstream or established industrial sectors, there are many positives to consider. **“We offer a stable and growing economy. We have an efficient, well-regulated banking system, and our legal system is transparent,”**⁸ says Uzi Landau, Israel’s Minister of National Infrastructure and also adds: **“Tamar’s natural gas and renewable energy will substantially reduce the country’s dependence on foreign energy suppliers.”**⁸ (Israel my beloved: Commerce & Industry)

⁸ OilandGasInvestor.com, November 2009 by Peggy Williams

c) **Israel – Greek partnership**

“There are significant prospects for cooperation in investment -- especially within the framework of the state-asset sales program,”⁹ the president of democracy Karolos Papoulias said at the dinner with his Israeli counterpart Shimon Peres in Athens in 6th August. Energy, agricultural development and technology are some of the sectors the two countries can work together in, Papoulias said. Those words describe the future plans of both countries. (Israel Can Cooperate in Many Sectors, Papoulias Says (August 2012))

Since the approval of the Kyoto Protocol and the rise of the world public awareness concerning the effects of global warming, there is a dramatic increase of the number of private companies and other stakeholders in the area of sustainable energy technologies. This interest is based on technological development of advanced efficient energy systems, relevant policy programs of public and private organizations and business interest of Israeli and EU (Greek) companies and investors. At the same time, European and Greek stakeholders have a wide and long experience in these areas. These two trends, the emerging awareness of the Israelis and the European (Greek) experience can be a base for bilateral and multilateral cooperation between Israeli and Greek companies, researchers and institutions. In March 2012, the Greek-Israel cooperation took another step forward when Israeli Energy & Water Minister, Uzi Landau, signed an agreement with Greek Environment, Energy and Climate Minister George Papaconstantinou for cooperation between their two countries in the field of environmental protection. The agreement calls for exchanging knowledge and sharing expertise, with particular emphasis on issues of water management, sewage treatment and reuse, desalination, bio-gas and biomass production, energy efficiency and other elements.

Landau also signed a memorandum of understanding with his Greek counterpart for the construction of an electric cable from Israel to Cyprus and Greece, which will allow for redundancy, reciprocal backup, security and long-term domestic energy for all the parties involved. Greece and Cyprus have agreed to an Israeli request to lay a power cable to Europe via the two Mediterranean nations. According

⁹ Bloomberg, Greece, Israel Can Cooperate in Many Sectors, Papoulias Says: by Natalie Weeks (August 2012): President Karolos Papoulias statements at the start of a dinner with his Israeli counterpart Shimon Peres in Athens

to the Jerusalem Post, the national Infrastructure Minister of Israel, Uzi Landau, and Cypriot commerce, Industry and Tourism Minister Neoklis Silikiotis and Greek Deputy Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Change met in Nicosia for the final discussions in regard to the power cable connecting Greece and Cyprus with Israel. The Israel-to-Europe cable will be built by the Israel Electric Corporation and PPP Quantum Energy, which is controlled by the Greek power utility and Cypriot companies. Israel and Cyprus signed an accord to lay the underwater cable in March. The cable will be 870 kilometers (540 miles long) long, buried at a depth of more than 2,000 meters (656 feet) and have a capacity of 2,000 megawatts – **“one of the biggest in the world,”**¹⁰ according to Yakov Hain, Senior Vice President of engineering projects at IEC. Ultimately, electricity lines will run from Israel to Cyprus to Crete, and then through the existing cable to mainland Greece, enabling the connection of European and Asian electricity supplies. The cost of the project should be roughly 1.5 billion Euros, but there is no official estimate yet, he added. The so-called **“Euro-Asia Interconnect,”** is **“a historic event — no more Israel as an economic island,”**¹⁰ Israel Electric Corporation CEO Yiftach Ron Tal said at the signing.

The fact that Sylikiotis is new to his ministry, having replaced Praxoulla Antoniadou earlier that month, was the reason Papaconstantinou cited for the non-signing of a memorandum of cooperation that had been previously announced. However, the signing’s postponement may also be linked to Nicosia’s intention to keep the door open to other companies and not just the US firm Noble, which located the hydrocarbon reserves. Sylikiotis made it clear that Nicosia wishes to have other companies and countries involved. Delek Drilling Ltd Chairman Gideon Tadmor said the Israeli company will pursue any opportunity to explore for oil and natural gas in Greece. **“We believe the natural gas finds in Israel, which were duplicated in Cyprus, will also be duplicated in Greece,”**¹¹ Tadmor said at the same conference. (Greece, Cyprus Underwater Line for Israel’s Electricity (November 2012))

Drilling is already underway in Israel’s Tamar, Leviathan and other deep sea fields that hold an estimated 35 trillion c.f. (cubic feet) of natural gas. Israel has partnered with Cyprus in drilling within the latter’s Exclusive Economic Zone.

¹⁰ Greek Reporter, Greece, Cyprus Underwater Line for Israel’s Electricity, by Christina Flora (November 2012)

¹¹ Ekathimerini, Greek-Cypriot-Israeli ‘energy axis’ by Chryssa Liaggou, conference in Athens organized by The Economist (March 2012).

Deposits and anticipated drilling in Greece also help transform Eastern Mediterranean into a new center of global strategic importance. Furthermore, some of the discoveries in the area are within the EU, controlled at least partially by EU members Cyprus and Greece.

It is very important to indicate the key factors that can hold and promote mainly the whole project are big business funds. Typical examples are the two very important Investment Funds, appropriate and very keen for programming and expanding the plan of drilling in the field. For instance, Noble Energy Incorporation is already operating and running a number of projects. Mari-B field, Tamar, Leviathan, Dolphin and Tannin are some only of the regions that Noble group has started its works for gas drilling. Lately, there is also a last region, with works taking place at the Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone. Additionally, another important industry, Delek Group Ltd is also participating autonomously but at the same time by cooperating with Noble Energy with great success up to now.

Another indicative statement of how the procedure of drilling has been developed and progressed in Israel is the above: **“It’s not very often you get to be part of an exploration venture that has the potential to dramatically change a country’s energy supply”**¹², said by Chuck Davidson, chairman and chief executive officer of Noble Energy. Furthermore, Noble is now managing gross development projects of more than 2 billion barrels equivalent; in the last two and a half years, the company has discovered net resources of more than 700 million barrels in Israel, the deep-water Gulf of Mexico, and off-shore West Africa. Consequently, the very sizeable opportunities that are yet to be drilled on its extensive acreage position off-shore Israel could mean more reserves for Noble and much more gas for Israel.

If we take into consideration the situation in Israel, we can easily understand that Israel works as an ideal example for the other parts of the new alliance (Cyprus and Greece). So the participation of great investment groups, the appropriate cooperation between them, the supervising of the state where it is necessary and do not stands as a barrier, are the steps for a new road of development and economic growth. The plan seems to be already in action, so that has to be followed by the other members in order to meet their high demands and significant results in the next years.

¹² THE CYPRUS-U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE announces Noble Energy and Mr. Charles Davidson, chairman & CEO recipients of the 2012 distinguished merit award, (March 2012)

All these fundamental changes that took place the last years in the South-eastern Mediterranean have created with no doubt new conditions at the field of the energy supply. Except for the contemporary changes for Israel, Cyprus and Greece at the sphere of economic and strategic actions and re-orientations, a new route of energy supply has come up to the surface. Eastern Mediterranean has suddenly become an alternative supplier of energy to EU, which has depended the years ago heavily on Russian gas from the West Siberian fields. (Cyprus, Greece and Israel: a new alliance? (May 2012))

So, a new alliance will bring in the region a new route, which will not be connected at with the previous one. For instance, an expected gas pipeline coming to EU from Israel and Cyprus through Crete and Peloponnese is a less costly alternative option compared to the proposed Nabucco Azerbaijani gas pipeline. The Nabucco pipeline has made up to now Russia the key supplier and the strongest player in the region. If this pipeline will be fully funded in the next years- something that the EU tries to avoid- Russia would control at the same time the proposed Blue Stream 2 and Samsun-Ceyhan pipelines.

Supposing that the last 2 pipelines will be funded, Turkey will be fully profitable and take advantage at the sector of energy supply. This will be at the same time very worrying and damaging for Israel and Greece whose interests are on contrast with these of Turkey's. The forthcoming pipeline will enable the triangle as a prosperous and alternative route and of course will be harmful for the Turkish and Russian activity in the region. Russia seeks at any cost to maintain its sale monopoly to Europe and simultaneously controlling the prices through Gazprom (semi-private Russian Company). Even more, the state's representatives have been visiting Israel trying to purchase the gas Israel will be producing.

As another sign of taking pressure over its opponents in the region and in order to expand its power throughout the south-eastern Mediterranean, Russian has also attempted to seduce the last 2 years Greece with financial offers and has also loaned to Cyprus \$2 billion. The Russian federation also commands a presence through regular navy visits and has rebuilt recently the naval base of Tartu's in Syria. It is expected to serve aircraft carriers and guided-missile cruisers. Likewise, French and British ships show their presence regularly. This stands as a reminder that the two

powers (France, UK) once held a mandate over Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Cyprus and Israel. (Greek-Cypriot-Israeli “energy axis” (March 2012))

3. Commerce

The market in Israel is a small consumer market (7.6 million inhabitants) with a highly developed secondary sector and high technology sector. The Israeli economy coped well during the global economic crisis. So after a reduction in economic activity, which occurred in late 2008 and early 2009, the economy began recovering in the second quarter. The overall growth rate for 2009 was 0.8%. The Israeli economy showed strong growth in 2010. Overall growth for the year was 4.5% versus 0.8% in 2009. Growth was driven by higher exports, private consumption, investment in fixed assets and construction activity. The unemployment rate rose to 6.7%, below the level of 8.3% which is the average of OECD countries. The inflation rate rose to 2.7%, within the targets set by the government for inflation between 1 and 3% and the budget deficit reached 3.7% of GDP, compared to 5.2% in 2009. Exports account for about 40% of total economic activity. Exports of manufactured goods constitute 82.8% of total exports of Israel, of which 50% are high-tech products. In 2010, industrial exports (excluding diamonds) totaled 40.6 billion dollars (16.5% compared with 2009), exports of agricultural products to 1.4 billion dollars (10.5%) and diamond exports at 8.9 billion dollars (+51%). It is worth noting that in the structure of imports of Israel, imports of consumer goods account for only 14.7%, while imports raw materials (excluding diamonds and fuels) account for 38.7%, imports of capital equipment (machinery, vehicles) 14.5% and imports diamonds, fuels, ships and aircraft 31% of total imports, suggesting that the bulk of Israeli imports are inputs for domestic industry. In 2010, imports of goods amounted to 58.6 billion dollars and exports of goods to 50.9 billion dollars trade deficit amounted to 7.7 billion dollars, exports of goods rose 21% compared with 2009 and imports of goods increased by 24.9%. On the import side, there was 23.4% increase in imports of raw materials (excluding diamonds and fuels), which amounted to 22.7 billion Imports of consumer goods increased by 13.5%. The most significant increase was recorded in imports of non-durable consumer goods (imports worth 564 million dollars). Imports of capital equipment increased by 12.8% to reach 8.5 billion dollars. Israel joined the OECD in May 2010. (ECONOMY: Sectors of the Israeli Economy (November 2010))

Israel is the fourth largest customer for Greek exports and the sixth largest supplier of our country in the Middle East - North Africa. The volume of bilateral trade is around 280-300 million €. The height of Greek exports in 2010 amounted to € 120 million compared to 89 million in 2009, marking a significant increase of 35% compared with the previous year. Imports from Israel amounted to € 163 million in 2010, versus 213 million in 2009 due to the fall in import demand in our country due to the economic crisis. The trade deficit fell by 66% amounting to 42.7 million euros against 124 million in 2009. The main exported products in 2010 were: Petroleum oils (18%), Copper Tubes (6.4%), cleaning products (5%), personal care products & Makeup (4.7%), Electrical Equipment Phone (3.5%), Bitumen Membranes (3 , 2%), Plastic dishes and household items (3%).

Greece holds the 35th position among the main partners of Israel in terms of trade volume. Among the EU countries, Greece is the 11th largest export markets of Israel and the 16th major supplier to Israel by value of imports. According to data from the Israeli Statistical Service, the volume of bilateral trade amounted to USD 413.7 million in 2010, decreased by 16.6% compared with 2009. Israel's exports to Greece totaled 214.4 million dollars, compared with 295 million dollars, a drop of around 27%. Imports from Israel to Greece amounted to 199.3 million dollars a slight decrease of 0.7% compared with the previous year. Note that there is variation among the elements of the Israeli Statistical Office and ELSTAT (Hellenic Statistic Service). Thus the class of towing vehicles (code 87168090) appears as the first value category imported goods on the basis of imports Isr. Stats. Service, while not presented in the ELSTAT. This is due to the fact that Greek ferries stationed temporarily in Israeli ports with container loading Israeli fresh fruits and vegetables destined for European markets. The container so they appear on imports. Also based Isr. Data recorded imports of soybeans (code 1201), and on the basis of ELSTAT exports are not recorded in this product. Another significant difference occurs in the data for the extraction of oil from oil (code 2710) where total imports from Greece did not exceed 4 million dollars in 2010, based on data ELSTAT. This category is the first Greek exportable product in 2010 (worth 21.7 million Euros).

Note also that the elements of Isr. Stats. Service in 2010 recorded imports worth 1.5 million dollars from Greece in the category of photosensitive semiconductor devices, including photovoltaic cells whether or not assembled in

modules or made up into panels, while based on NSSG data not recorded exports in this category.

Greek exports to the country, located mostly in goods (intermediate goods, raw materials, transportation equipment) for industrial use, and secondarily on consumer goods (fresh and packaged food, toiletries, medicines, cleaning products). In addition, the 2007-2010 Greek exports to Israel are making sequential decrease from year to year with the exception of 2010 when exports rose 35% compared to 2009. This implies that the market share of Greek products in the Israeli market is diminishing, partly because the "portfolio" of Greek products not expanded with new products, especially consumer goods, and other raw materials and intermediate goods exported face competition from other supplier countries, such as Turkey and China which export to Israel cheaper products having the advantage of a strong industrial base and economies of scale.

To increase the share of the Greek market of Israel needed expansion of the portfolio of Greek products to consumer products and higher value added products in the sectors analyzed above (food / drinks, medicines, disposable medical supplies, cosmetics, aluminum). Since the Israeli market is extremely competitive, a systematic effort on the part of Greek exporters in establishing lasting partnerships with Israeli importers, achieving a combination of competitive prices and quality products in compliance with the specific import conditions applying for each product and in strict specifications regarding the standardization and quality of products. In addition in order to find reliable business partners in the market it is required the organization of targeted trade missions to Israel or Israelis importers to be called in international exhibitions in Greece in the sectors of food, medicines and building materials, which have market prospects. Greek participation in major exhibitions could also offer better opportunities in the Israeli market.

On his visit previously mentioned in August, Peres was accompanied by Agriculture Minister Orit Noked. Some of the most promising areas for cooperation are related to water management, organic farming, applied farm research, land improvement and aquiculture. Both Israel and Greece face challenges in water management. The arid topography of Israel has spurred Israeli scientists to develop innovative farming methods and desalination technologies. Efficient desalination would be a major boost to many of Greece's islands that suffer inadequate freshwater reserves and must often rely on shipped water. Food and beverage, another area under

discussion, is the strongest sector in Greek manufacturing, accounting for 25 percent of turnover, 24% of employment, 25% of total invested capital and almost 25% of added value. Foreign companies have experienced high rates of success in this sector, and Greece serves as an ideal bridge to the emerging markets of Southeast Europe. Abundant opportunities exist in creating added value in many product categories, especially as the global interest in healthy food, snacks and convenience foods continues to rise. Honey- and nut-based snacks, spaghetti products, jams, pickled goods and novel seafood and meat products demonstrate a significant potential in numerous markets. And as consumption of olive oil grows, Greece is ideally positioned to respond in this sector, being the third largest producer of olive oil in the world.

4. Military action/cooperation

The Defense Minister of Greece Panos Beglitis and his Israeli counterpart Ehud Barak signed a memorandum on military cooperation in Jerusalem in September 2011, the Greek Ministry of Defense reported. The contents of the memorandum remained undisclosed. Panos Beglitis said that the two governments are intending to cooperate closely. **"Our relations with Israel are not under the influence of the current condition,"**¹³ said Beglitis. In January 2012, that expansion of ties became more official when the Greek and Israeli defense ministers announced the signing of a defense cooperation agreement. The pact was cemented during Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak's trip to Greece, the fourth such trip by a high-ranking Israeli government official since the summer of 2010. **"We are committed to work together to deepen our relations in defense and security," said Barak. "We have to be prepared for many kinds of developments. We must think ahead of time and work together."**¹⁴ During the last four years amid the economic crisis, wars in Libya and Syria, the ongoing political and diplomatic tensions in the wider Eastern Mediterranean, the continuous improvement of Greek – Israeli relations remains perhaps the only constant that is in favor of both countries. The strongest military “player” in the region is regularly exercising with the Greek Armed Forces, certainly learning from them. The aim is that the Greeks also learn from their Israeli counter

¹³ RiaNovosti, Greece and Israel agree on military cooperation, (September 2011) Report of the Greek Ministry.

¹⁴ Defence news, Greece, Israel Pledge to Boost Defense Ties (January 2012)

parts, not only in the tactical level, but also in the strategic and political level. In the midst of an extremely fluid international situation, in a difficult multivariate equation that best describes the strategic situation in the Eastern Mediterranean; the Greek-Israeli cooperation is becoming a valuable support for both countries. (Greek Cyprus ratifies military cooperation deal with Israel (July 2012))

Israel, the United States and Greece conducted a naval exercise in the Mediterranean Sea, in what Greek media outlets are saying is a message to Turkey following frayed ties with both Israel and Greece. The exercise, called "Noble Dina," involved simulations of combat against submarines, air battles and protection of offshore natural gas platforms. The U.S. Sixth Fleet also participated in the exercise, which the Greek media, which first reported on it, has described as being meant to send a message to Turkey.

Until 2009, Israel's Navy and the U.S. Sixth Fleet conducted a large yearly exercise with the Turkish navy called "Reliant Mermaid." Following the deterioration in Israel-Turkey relations in recent years and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's decision to freeze military cooperation with Israel, the exercise was cancelled.

In April 2011, Israel and the U.S. decided to renew the exercise, but changed its name to Noble Dina. Greece, which was invited to participate instead of Turkey, jumped at the offer, which it saw as a political achievement against Turkey. Relations between the two countries are currently tense due to Turkish threats to act against Cyprus' natural gas platforms, in which Greece has interests. IDF sources confirmed that the exercise was taking place, but refused to convey additional details.

The exercise began on March 26 and ended on April 5. According to reports in the Greek media, the exercise began at an American military base in Crete. Reportedly participating in the exercise are a Greek navy destroyer and submarine, an Israeli Navy sailing vessel and several U.S. Sixth Fleet battleships, along with Israeli, Greek and American fighter jets and helicopters.

According to a report published on the Greek website Defencenet.gr, part of the exercise took place off the coast of Turkey. The exercise continued off the southern coast of Cyprus before concluding in Haifa port. The site reported that enemy forces in the simulation would have characteristics similar to those of the Turkish air force. The site also noted that the exercise would address scenarios

involving defense of offshore gas platforms in the Mediterranean from enemy attack, anti-submarine fighting and air battles.

Over last two years, Israel and Greece have intensified their military and intelligence cooperation. A large portion of the Israel Air Force exercises which previously took place in Turkey have moved to Greece as a result of the crisis in relations between Israel and Turkey. Several months ago, incoming Israel Air Force chief Amir Eshel visited Greece, where he met with top Greek officials, including the country's defense minister, chief of staff and air force commander. Eshel currently serves as head of the IDF's Planning Directorate. (Turkey's nemesis, Greece, new friend to Israel (October 2010)) (Israel, Greece conduct joint naval drill amid ongoing tension with Turkey (April 2012))

Israeli warships launched a naval exercise with real ammunition in Greek territorial waters on July 18, 2012. The exercise took place in the north of the island of Milos (Cyclades) in the Aegean Sea. Only Israeli warships will perform the exercise at the 'shooting area' Karavia (Milos/Myrtoo Sea), while the coordination and monitoring will be performed by radars on the Parnitha Mt in Greek mainland. Until now no information has been given regarding the type and number of vessels that participated. And most likely no information would be made public on the vessels, due to traditional Israeli military policy. The exercise in Greek territorial waters took part in the context of Greek-Israeli military cooperation and coincidentally a couple of days after the 4-day visit of Greek navy commander Vice Admiral Kosmas Christidis in Israel, during which he met with OC Navy Vice- Adm. Ram Rothberg and sailed on a Saar 5-class missile ship. The exercise worried Ankara to see its former friend (Israel) in close cooperation with its former foe (Greece). **“Israeli war vessels are now under our noses”**¹⁵ Turkish portal Habermonitor wrote. However it is not just Turkey that sees with discomfort the Israel exercise in the area. Also Cyprus' turned to look sour at Israeli, British and Turkish naval forces simultaneous maneuvers near Cyprus. Cypriot media reports claimed that Israel and the UK requested and received permission from Cyprus to hold their maneuvers but that the Turkish Navy did not, and as a result Nicosia was considering submitting an official complaint to the United Nations. With so many different interests the

¹⁵ Keep talking Greece, Israeli Naval Exercise in Greece “sours” Turkey (July 2012)

Eastern Mediterranean Sea will continue to be the field of high tensions, especially when it comes to naval exercises. (Greece, Israel on military cooperation (September 2011))

The Greek – Israeli cooperation regarding the air forces started with the exercise “Glorious Spartan” in May 2008, continued with the exercise “Minos” in May 2010 during which Israeli jet fighters were operating from air bases of the HAF in Crete and which was stopped because of the “Mavi Marmara” incident. The exercise “Morning Wind”, i.e. the second part of the exercise “Minos” 2010 concerning Combat Search and Rescue, took place in October 2010 in Andravida AB and the Peloponnese region in Greece. Shortly after, the HAF participated in the operations for extinguishing fires in Carmel in Israel earning the gratitude of the Israeli public opinion and helping not only in humanitarian terms but also in purely bilateral political level improving relations between the two countries in an unprecedented level. During the summer of 2011 the second CSAR exercise took place in the 110 CW at Larissa, Greece. In November 2011 it was the turn of HAF’s 337 Squadron to visit the Ovda Air Base in Israel. Later, the Hellenic Navy replaced the TDK during the naval exercise “Noble Dina” in March 2012, followed a few months later with a joint naval exercise in the Myrto Sea in Greece. The last link in the chain came one month earlier with a joint air exercise in Crete.

Another indicative case that shows the continuous convergence between the two nation states at the field of security was the visit of the Greek minister of defense Panagiotis Panagiotopoulos. The official meeting with the Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak and also the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu took place on September 6 2012 in Tel Aviv, Israel.

The Greek Minister claimed that **a wide variety of issues, relating to the bilateral defense cooperation and about the regional and international security situation, were taken up during the talks.**¹⁶ A month earlier, the Israeli President Shimon Peres had undertaken a 3-day long official visit to Greece. The Israeli Defense Minister, Ehud Barak also spoke highly on the visit by Panagiotopoulos. He claimed that the **visit will go a long way in cementing the defense relationship**

¹⁶ Greece Defence, Greek Defence minister calls his Israeli visit a successful one (September 2012)

between the two nations.¹⁷ Barak also hinted that the visit by Panagiotopoulos will be reciprocated by him in the near future. (Greek Defense Minister calls his Israeli visit a successful one (September 2012))

According to a laconic announcement of the Hellenic Air Force, **“from Sunday, 21 to Friday, October 26, 2012 and in the context of the Military Cooperation between Greece and Israel for 2012 a joint training exercise took place at the 110 Combat Wing / Air Base Larissa in Greece”.**¹⁸ Certainly this short statement has more connotations: with this exercise the level of the military cooperation between Greece and Israel goes another step as it is the third time that Israeli jet fighters landed in a Greek Air Base after the beginning of the military cooperation between the two countries in 2008. A cooperation that also included joint naval drills during which Israeli corvettes were hosted in Salamis, the main Naval Base of the Hellenic Navy in August 2012. This third time Israeli warplanes were hosted by the HAF shows the growing confidence between the two air forces and the high level of cooperation between them. (Greek-Israeli joint air force exercise held at Larissa AB Greece, Oct. 21-26th (November 2012)) (Israeli Naval Exercise in Greece “sours” Turkey (July 2012))

5. Tourism

Israel and Greece are already on plenty of tourism bucket lists, particularly thanks to their heritage as centers of fascinating history, vibrant living cultures and archaeological discoveries seemingly around every corner: Israel has the Western Wall, Church of the Holy Sepulcher and the Dead Sea; Greece is home of the Acropolis and antiquities from the ancient, Roman and Byzantine eras.

Greece attracts more than 17.5 million people each year, contributing 15% to the nation's Gross Domestic Product. Greece has been an attraction for international visitors since antiquity for its rich and long history, Mediterranean coastline and beaches. In 2005, 6,088,287 tourists alone visited the city of Athens, the capital city. In 2009, the country welcomed over 19.3 million tourists, a major increase from the

¹⁷ Greece Defense, Greek Defence minister calls his Israeli visit a successful one (September 2012)

¹⁸ Defense Greece, Greek-Israeli joint air force exercise held at Larissa AB Greece, Oct. 21-26th

17.7 million tourists the country welcomed in 2008. The vast majority of tourists in the country are from within the European Union (12.7 million), followed by those from the Americas (0.56 million), Asia (0.52 million), Oceania (0.1 million) and Africa (0.06 million). In the year 2007, more British people visited the country than any other nationality, numbering 2.61 million in total, and making up 15% of the country's tourists for that year alone. Additionally, 2.3 million Germans, 1.8 million Albanians and 1.1 million Bulgarians visited the country that year. In 2007, 92.8% of the total number of tourists in Greece was from countries in Europe. In the last years, there has been significant increase in number of tourists from Israel, because of the crisis between Israel and Turkey.

The most-visited region of Greece is that of Central Macedonia in northern Greece, near some of the most popular attractions in the country such as Halkidiki, Mount Olympus, Pella, the birthplace of Alexander the Great, and Greece's second-largest city, Thessaloniki. In 2009, Central Macedonia welcomed 3.6 million tourists, or 18% of the total number of tourists that visited Greece that year, followed by Attica (2.6 million) and the Peloponnese (1.8 million). Northern Greece is the country's most-visited region, with 6.5 million tourists, while Central Greece comes second with 6.3 million. (Greece Tourism: Information about tourism in Greece)

According to a survey conducted in China in 2005, Greece was voted as the Chinese people's number one choice as a tourist destination. In November 2006, Austria, like China, announced that Greece was the favorite tourist destination for its citizens. In line with these observations, Greece's former Minister of Tourism Aris Spiliotopoulos announced the opening of a Greek National Tourism Organization office in Shanghai by the end of 2010, and GNTO currently operates two tourism offices in China, one in Shanghai and one in Beijing. At the same time, tourism consumption increased considerably since the turn of the millennium, from US\$ 17.7 bn. in 2000 to US\$ 29.6 bn. in 2004. The numbers of jobs directly or indirectly related to the tourism sector were 659,719 and represented 16.5% of the country's total employment for that year.

On the other hand, tourism has been largely affected by the economic crisis that Greece suffers. International tourists are shunning Greece, and hampering the country's economic recovery, as figures reveal that holidaymakers are deterred by the country's role in the euro zone debt crisis. The fall in the number of foreign visitors is

a blow to a country that largely relies on tourism. Nearly 11% fewer tourists came to Greece between January and May than a year earlier, according to latest figures from the Bank of Greece. Holidaymakers who travelled to Greece spent €1.48bn (£1.2bn), 12.5% less than in the same period last year. The figures do not bode well for Greece's attempts to keep to its deficit reduction plan. Tourism makes up 16.5% of the economy, the largest single contributor, and one in five Greeks work in the industry. Last week officials from the IMF, the European Union and the European Central Bank – the so-called troika – warned that Greece had strayed from its cost-cutting plan, amid estimates that the economy is contracting by 7% this year rather than the 5% previously forecast. Uncertainty over whether Greece will stay in the euro, and two national elections in May and June that attracted global media coverage, put people off spring breaks in the Mediterranean country. (Euro zone crisis knocks Greek tourist trade (July 2012)) ((Israel and Greece build tourism links (April 2011))

Individual actions have taken place to face the crisis in tourism such as the one from the mayor of Thessaloniki Mr. Yannis Boutaris. To mitigate the crisis, Boutaris has revived tourism, drawing visitors from new markets but also the ire of Greek nationalists. Only in 2011 foreign arrivals rose by 37%. **"I travel to Sofia, Belgrade, Tirana, Skopje and say 'come to Thessaloniki and have a good time',"**¹⁹ said Boutaris, who breathed new life into his family's abandoned mountain village of Nymfaion in the 1990s by setting up a hotel, restaurants and a wildlife reserve there. To lure tourists to Thessaloniki he staged the 12th edition of Womex, a big world music festival, and a gay pride parade, infuriating the city's conservative clergy. It is important to note the pre- holocaust past of Thessaloniki. The city was known as "Second Jerusalem" before most of the Jewish population perished in German concentration camps. Boutaris said his first girlfriend was Jewish. Kapon, a former broker whom Boutaris appointed to run the city's finances is proud to be the city's first Jewish municipal counselor since 1937. Boutaris travelled to Israel to evoke the city's flourishing Jewish, pre-Holocaust past. Greece has turned to its allies, one of which is Israel to cope and promote tourist exchanges. (Zoominfo.com: Mr. Yannis Boutaris (November 2012))

¹⁹ Ekathimerini, Greek can-do mayor bucks national trend in fixing city finances, By Harry Papachristou (November 2012).

Tourists are attracted by Israel's geographical diversity, its archeological and religious sites, the almost unlimited sunshine and modern resort facilities on the Mediterranean, Lake Kinneret (Sea of Galilee), the Red Sea, and the Dead Sea. In the year 2000, the largest number of tourists ever - 2.41 million - visited the country (compared to 33,000 in 1950, 118,000 in 1960, 441,000 in 1970, 1.18 million in 1980, and 1.34 million in 1990). This figure was topped in 2008 as Israel opened its doors to more than 3 million tourists. Visitor figures continue to rise. In the first half of 2010, 1.6 million tourists visited Israel, 39 percent more than in the same period last year, and 10 percent more than in 2008. Americans make up 21 percent of the tourists in Israel, with Russians making up 15 percent and other European countries making up much of the rest. Tourism provided foreign currency earnings of \$2.8 billion in 2006, i.e. 5 percent of the income from all exports and 16.8 percent of the export of services. In the first half of 2010, incoming tourism brought in about \$1.55 billion. Although this industry contributes less than 3% to the GNP, it has a foreign currency added value of 85 percent (making it the added-value leader among the country's export industries) and employs some 80,000 persons. This industry's large potential is yet to be exploited, as it is a major factor in Israel's economic growth plan and Greece as an experienced ally in this sector can even be more helpful. (Israel and Greece build tourism links (April 2011))

6. Culture

Both Israel and Greece developed within the overarching context of the dominant ancient Near Eastern imperial powers from Egypt to Mesopotamia. Both Israel and Greece resisted these empires, expressing themselves as free societies and as cultural innovators, in differing ways. Israel is an old inland society just inside the ancient Near East, the terminus of trade routes by land, struggling to escape, which however it can do only in the most critical areas. Greece is a seaboard society just outside the ancient Near East, to which the Mediterranean is open for trade and colonization, enjoying indigenous cultural resources, on which the Near East exercises an ongoing fascination. Thus, the two societies are similar in their resistance and rejection of ancient Near Eastern imperial culture. The chief differences between Israel and Greece reside in Israelite monotheism, survival themes, and emphasis on lineage, compared to Greek pantheons, themes of tragedy, and emphasis on language. The confluence of Greece and Israel in the New Testament and early Christianity, which produced a language that could build on the cultural innovations of both cultures in ways more basic and more advantageous to civilization's subsequent development. Even today in western civilization, these two cultures continue their influence in the classroom (the Greek heritage of critical questioning) and in the congregation (the Israelite, Judeo-Christian heritage of priestly faith communities). Rather than understanding the legacies of Greece and Israel as opposites of West and East or as competing forces of Reason and Faith, both should be faced as continuing traditions of resistance and critique to the imperialism continuing in the world today. (Israel Diplomatic Network, Embassy of Israel in Greece, Culture)

7. Current condition

a) Greece

Over the last decade, Greece went on a debt binge that came crashing to an end in late 2009, provoking an economic crisis that has decimated the country's economy, brought down its government, unleashed increasing social unrest and threatened the future of the euro. Since a change in government revealed the true size of the country's massive deficits, Greece has been kept afloat by its fellow euro zone countries, but at a steep price: the austerity measures demanded by France and Germany in return for two massive bailout packages, totaling 240 billion Euros, have ripped holes in the Greek safety net and plunged the country into a recession of near-

Great Depression dimensions. After long resisting the idea of a default, European officials in March 2012 helped Greece negotiate a landmark debt restructuring deal with the vast majority of its private sector lenders, who agreed to swap \$77 billion in Greek debt for new bonds worth as much as 75 percent less. It was the largest default in history. The deal cleared the way for the so-called troika — European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund — to begin releasing funds from the second, 130 billion euro (\$163.4 billion) bailout package, avoiding an uncontrolled default. But many economists said it still left Greece saddled with unsustainable debts and little prospects for growth. While Greece received billions of Euros in emergency assistance from the lenders overseeing its bailout, almost none of the money is going to the Greek government to pay for vital public services. Instead, much of it is flowing directly back into the troika's pockets. The European bailout that was supposed to buy time for Greece is mainly servicing the interest on the country's debt; other funds have been set aside for propping up the nation's shaky banks. Meanwhile, the Greek economy continues to decline.

In early May 2012, voters upended the country's political system in a parliamentary election that saw the crushing defeat of the dominant parties, who were blamed for Greece's collapse. Parties representing the left and the far-right made gains, as Greeks protested the austerity pact. A second round of elections was held in June, after no party was able to form a government. The winner was Antonis Samaras, the leader of the center-right New Democracy party, who became prime minister after cobbling together a shaky coalition and began seeking concessions from the country's lenders. In late July, officials in Germany began to speak openly of the possibility that Greece would leave the euro in the fall. But in August, when Mr. Samaras made a plea in the German press for **“a little breathing room,”**²⁰ there were signs of a more conciliatory atmosphere. Euro zone leaders also began to acknowledge that the austerity program imposed on Greece by the troika had taken such a toll on living standards that it had become counterproductive. (The New York Times: Greece (November 2012))

In September, Mr. Samaras drafted a plan for an €11.5 billion austerity package that included fresh cuts to pensions, salaries and other expenses, hoping to convince the troika to release nearly 32 billion Euros, or \$40.7 billion, in financial aid

²⁰ The New York Times, Greece, by Angelos Tzortzinis (November 2012)

that the country needs to stay solvent. But the troika rejected an initial version of the plan, saying in effect that they did not think he would be able to deliver. Even as Mr. Samaras worked to revise the plan, public opposition to more austerity deepened, with polls showing both Syriza and Golden Dawn, a right-wing party linked to anti-immigrant violence, making gains. In summer and fall 2012, Golden Dawn stepped up its attacks against immigrants. In October, Greece reached an agreement with the troika of lenders on a revised plan, totaling \$23 billion in savings over four years. In November, after some of the most violent protests to date, Parliament passed the plan, but the coalition was shaken by the large number of defections. The measures - including sharp cuts to pensions, salaries and social services, as well as tax increases and increases in the retirement age to 67 from 65 - are expected, but not guaranteed, to persuade Greece's foreign creditors to unlock around \$40 billion in aid that the country needs to meet expenses. With state coffers virtually empty, an economy near depression and unemployment at a record high of 25 percent, Greece is counting on the money to keep the government running. It also needs to pay off a portion of more than 8 billion Euros in arrears that it owes suppliers for basic products, like medicines, that some companies have stopped supplying to Greece until they are paid. And yet most of the money would not be put directly back into the economy. Instead, about 85 percent of the loan installment would go to replenishing the capital reserves of Greece's shaky banking system. Those cushions were depleted early in 2012 after the banks lost huge amounts of money, when the government forced its creditors to take a 50 percent loss on the Greek bonds — held in large part by Greece's banks. (The New York Times: Greece (November 2012))

b) Israel

Israel is also in a very unstable political situation with the PM Netanyahu declaring early elections while there is a hot incident with the Hamas under way. Netanyahu has called a general election early next year in a move designed to avoid a damaging defeat over a proposed austerity budget but also likely to give him a renewed and potentially increased mandate for military action against Iran. **"I have decided, for the benefit of Israel, to hold elections now and as quickly as**

possible,"²¹ Netanyahu said at a press conference, without specifying the date of the poll.

Israel's economy and national security are the two issues likely to dominate the election campaign, with the question of a peace agreement with the Palestinians being pushed down the political agenda. The election is expected to be in late January or early February. Netanyahu's party, Likud, is expected to comfortably win the largest share of the Israeli parliament's 120 seats, almost four years after the last election in February 2009. The prime minister had the option of waiting until next October before going to the electorate. His coalition government has proved unexpectedly stable despite repeated threats by his small rightwing coalition partners to bring down the government. Under Israel's electoral system of proportional representation the leader of the biggest party will have to negotiate with smaller parties to form a new coalition government.

Netanyahu's decision to call early elections rests on two main domestic considerations. The first is the forthcoming national budget. The prime minister faces a struggle to get an austerity budget passed in the face of the warring interests of the smaller parties in his coalition who have an eye on their constituencies. He may believe it is better to call an election than see the government fall in the wake of the budget crashing in flames. The second concerns his political opponents. Kadima, the main opposition party, is currently floundering in the polls. The latest Haaretz survey gives it eight seats, down from 28 at the last election. Labour is the principal beneficiary, with its projected number of seats rising to 20 from 13. But Netanyahu's Likud is predicted to be the biggest party by some measure in the 120-seat Knesset, with 28 seats. The prime minister's personal ratings on suitability to lead the next government are way ahead of those of his rivals. On the assumption that Netanyahu forms the next coalition government, he may opt for a more centrist complexion than the current rightwing composition. After the last election Netanyahu's first move was to bring Kadima into the coalition, only resorting to the small religious parties when that failed. A "national unity" government may give him cover to pursue military action against Iran. Iran is Netanyahu's primary issue. At the United Nations he publicly deferred the likely date of Israeli military action against Iran's nuclear

²¹ The Guardian, Binyamin Netanyahu calls early general election in Israel
By Harriet Sherwood (October 2012).

program until next spring or summer. Netanyahu will hope to win a renewed electoral mandate before such a high-risk move, rather than launch a potentially disastrous war in the months running up to a general election. (Binyamin Netanyahu calls early general election in Israel (October 2012))

The outcome of the US election may also be a factor in Netanyahu's decision. With the re-election of Barack Obama in November, he may seek to punish the Israeli prime minister for his perceived support for the Republican candidate, Mitt Romney. That approach will be harder if Netanyahu also has a renewed mandate. Opposition parties will be keen to make the economy the significant issue of the election. Before Netanyahu's announcement the Labor leader, Shelly Yacimovich, said early elections would end an "unstable and unhealthy" situation.

Israel has launched a military operation to eliminate militants and weapon sites in the Gaza Strip in 14th November, killing the commander of Hamas's military wing, in a move with potentially serious repercussions beyond its borders. The assassination of Ahmed al-Jabari in a missile strike in Gaza City was the **"start of a broader operation"**²², according to the Israel Defense Forces, which it named Operation Pillar of Defense. Ground forces were on standby, the IDF said. The Israeli prime minister, Binyamin, warned that the military was "prepared to expand" its Gaza operation. A cabinet communiqué said the IDF would **"continue vigorous action against the terrorist infrastructures operating from the Gaza Strip against the civilian population in Israel"**²². It would, **"to the best of its ability, work to avoid harming civilians"**²². In a statement on Twitter, the IDF said: **"All options are on the table. If necessary, the IDF is ready to initiate a ground operation in Gaza."**²² The Israeli navy also confirmed that its gunships had fired shells into the Gaza Strip, and there were unconfirmed reports of an incursion in the south of the Gaza Strip late on. The United Nations Security Council held an emergency meeting on Wednesday night to discuss the onslaught and heard a plea from the Palestinian UN observer to stop **"war crimes being perpetrated by Israel against the Palestinian people"**²². The Israeli ambassador replied that the strikes were launched after days of rocket fire out of Gaza and Israel had a right to defend itself. (Israeli PM Netanyahu 'ready' to order strike on Iran (November 2012))

²² The Guardian, Hamas says 'gates of hell opened' as Israel kills military leader in Gaza by Harriet Sherwood (November 2012)

In the Middle East we are at a particularly volatile time in history reasonably certain that Israel was headed to a ground operation in Gaza. It seemed fairly inevitable since Hamas's response to our demand for quiet was a barrage of rockets, a barrage that continues off and on even as I write, and which has brought injuries and trauma and destruction of property. What is more, Hamas demanded conditions for a ceasefire - such as Israel's cessation of the sea blockade - that was totally unacceptable and was rejected out of hand by Netanyahu. Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri then announced that cease fire negotiations with Israel had failed. It seemed fairly obvious at that point that Hamas wasn't looking for a cease fire. And the ground operation seemed inevitable. Today the situation has shifted, at least tentatively. Some sorts of negotiations, brokered by Egypt, are taking place. Reports vary as to what is being demanded on each side while the situation is still under way. (The Israel situation (November 2012)) (Hamas says 'gates of hell opened' as Israel kills military leader in Gaza (November 2012))

Hopefully cease of fire has been announced lately between the Israel and the Hamas after tough negotiations with the mediation of Hillary Clinton, minister of foreign affairs in the U.S. and the President of Egypt Mohammed Morsi.

Conclusion

To sum up, we can easily say that a new geopolitical strategic activity is shaping up among Israel and Greece. The south-eastern Mediterranean does not work lately as a barrier between Israel and Europe but as a profitable nexus through the connection with its new allies in the region. The new alliance is being established through economical, strategic, political and cultural convergence. The ideological and ethnic contentions or prohibitions seem to belong in the past. Greece has made a very wise turn, leaving behind the pre-Arab obsession of the last 40 years. Greek leaderships have underestimated the importance of a verge with Israel and expressed very wrongly a strong pre-Arab policy and support. Mainly this was happening due to internal reasons and accordingly to the pressure from the public view.

Reaching to a conclusion, I strongly believe that as we know from the theory of the international relations, that's politics, a continuous fight among different and antithetical interests between nation-states. So, allies or enemies of the past many times change roles at a present condition, in order to promote the new interests and impose their new goals. Accordingly, Israel works for Greece as an indispensable

partner with superb technology and security know-how, while exploring the Aegean Sea for economic benefit. At the same time, Greece and Cyprus, as mentioned before, work as the ideal nexus of adjusting and connecting Israel with the EU field. The new alliance seems very profitable and important for both countries and it is for their own stake to develop and extend their cooperation more. (Israeli-Greek Alliance Grows Stronger (July 2012))

The forthcoming alliance should function under the same path of progress and evolution for both nation states. It is of great importance for Israel and Greece to take into consideration the balance of power in the region of the south-eastern Mediterranean and at the same time of taking advantage the new opportunities and shifts. The constant strengthening of the alliance could lead to a serious factor of stability combined with the participation of the Cypriot state in the alliance; a new promising geostrategic “triangle” is rising. In a global environment and in a world that everything changes rapidly, it is very wise for nation states to establish powerful alliances and agreements for the safety, prosperity, stability and security of their people.

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