



**PATHWAYS TO A
COMMON FUTURE:
YOUTH PERSPECTIVES
ON TURKEY-ISRAEL**

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INTRODUCTION

Political relations between Turkey and Israel have been characterized by long periods of tension interrupted by relatively short periods of rapprochement. Turkey was among the first countries to recognize Israel. Despite the prompt establishment of formal diplomatic relations, the bilateral relations have never been trouble free. Turkey and Israel have been traditionally characterized as ‘Western allies’ grounded on their significant role in a region that is widely known for political instability. Relations significantly soured in the past ten years due to multiple factors, such as Turkey’s domestic politics, political rhetoric, foreign policy decisions and Israel’s policy against Palestinians. In the recent years, bilateral political relations have become strained following a series of incidents, especially the Mavi Marmara incident.

There is a strong idea that Turkish-Israeli relations are profoundly unnatural and paradoxical. This idea is reflected in arguments highlighting Turkey’s role as the first Muslim country to recognize the state of Israel. Bilateral relations are often presented as a security-driven unwanted alliance stemming from scarcity of alternatives; a forced relationship imposed upon a society represented as deeply hostile towards Israel.

This report challenges the pre-judgement of an inborn hostility of Turkish society towards Israel. Recognizing the need to pinpoint the problems that lie at the heart of Turkish-Israeli relations, this report offers a diagnosis for the issues between two countries and provides an overview of how these issues are perceived by younger generations in Turkey; thereby providing basis for more effective people-to-people programs fostering dialogue.

The report consists of five sections. It begins with a multi-layered overview of bilateral relations, which will draw heavily from previous literature that has been published. The second section will assess the perceptions of Israel amongst the Turkish population, drawing from the results of in-depth interviews. The third section will assess economic ties and analyze their overlapping impact on bilateral relations. The fourth section will present an overview of the societal impact of Holocaust

education and remembrance activities within Turkey. Finally, the fifth section will focus on defining a positive agenda for Turkish-Israeli relations.

The data provided by the interviews with a selected group of young people in Turkey is at the core of this study. The limitations in resources and time at disposal has guided in the choice of the methodology. The second section of the study is based on 26 qualitative interviews structured around 10 questions aimed at evaluating the perceptions of Israelis, Israel and of Jews. The interviews were conducted in February-March 2016. The project team decided to interview university students including several new graduates. This participant group aged 25-30 year-old young adults will help shape Turkey's future. For that reason, the project team aimed to capture the transformations that have been at work in the last two decades assuming that patterns inherited from the early 90's were not applicable and adequate anymore to understand Turkish society. The project team adopted a monographic approach and could elaborate a profile of each respondent. Our two research assistants who conducted the interviews, Seval Kk and Mehmet Ilhanlı have a central role in the research. They selected the respondents within their social environment. Mehmet conducted interviews with a dozen students and new graduates that define themselves as religious and conservative. Most of the respondents are originally from Central Anatolian cities and some define themselves as Kurdish. Some are apolitical and active within conservative NGOs, the group includes sympathizers of the Glen Movement as well as members of Justice and Development Party (AKP), and a sympathizer of the Milli Grş. This 'conservative' group is all the more interesting because it can illustrate, to a certain extent from a sociological point of view, the electoral majority.

The students Seval Kk has selected for her interviews share the common characteristic of being affiliated with a political party. This group of respondents includes students affiliated with the Peoples' Republican Party (CHP), Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), Freedom and Solidarity Party (DP), Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) as well as one respondent who defines himself as an anarchist. The majority of this group of respondents is originally from central and southeast Anatolia. The project team categorized this group as 'secular' as opposed to the former group of 'conservative' respondents to broadly define the groups of respondents. The project team is aware of the methodological limitation of this research. For that reason, we will avoid generalizations and hope that our findings will help formulate new questions and restructure the debates around Turkish-Israeli relations by integrating fresh data and insights of Turkey's young adults.

1. TURKISH-ISRAELI BILATERAL RELATIONS IN RETROSPECT

The history of Turkish-Israeli relations dates back to Turkey's recognition of Israel as an independent state on 28 March 1949, Israel's establishment followed by the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two countries. Although not free from political, commercial and military constraint, relations between Turkey and Israel have been sustained over the years.

Both parties' political alignment with the United States and Turkey's membership in NATO had significant impact on Turkish-Israeli relations within the Cold War context. Although these political alignments contributed to friendly Turkish-Israeli relations during the Cold War, it also became difficult for Turkey as a predominantly Muslim country to remain indifferent to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Correspondingly, as the conflict intensified over the course of many years, Turkey severed its ties with Israel several times.¹

Until the end of the 1980s, relations between Turkey and Israel were less official and covert. In the early 1990s, Turkey furthered its relations with Israel as the Arab-Israeli peace process started to render positive results. During the 1990s, Turkey and Israel agreed to cooperate on joint projects, began negotiations on free trade, and engaged in military cooperation. Simultaneously, Turkey upgraded its diplomatic relations with Israel to the ambassadorial level once again.² The mid-1990s witnessed a major transformation of Turkish-Israeli relations into a strategic partnership encompassing economic, diplomatic and military relations.³ The zenith of bilateral relations in the 1990s by large is owed to Turkey and Israel's security concerns in respect to Kurdish and Palestinian conflicts.

The positive atmosphere created by the ongoing Middle East Peace Process had its impact on Turkish-Israeli rapprochement in the 1990s. However, following the establishment of a new

¹ Jacob Abadi, Israel and Turkey: From Overt to Covert Relations, *Journal of Conflict Studies* 15 (2), 1995, retrieved from: <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/jcs/article/view/4548/5389> , p.1

² Abadi, *ibid*, pp. 10-11.

³ Efraim Inbar, *The Resilience of Israeli Turkish Relations*, p. 2.

government in Israel under the leadership of Ariel Sharon in 2000 the relations began to deteriorate. In the 2000s, relations between the two countries entered into a new and more problematic phase.⁴

The Palestinian question appeared to be a significant determinant of Turkish-Israeli political relations in this phase.

Changes in Turkey's official diplomatic ties with Israel⁵

Date	Level of Turkey's Mission in Israel
January 1950	Inaugurated at 'Legation' level
November 1956 (Suez Canal crisis)	Downgrade to 'Charge d'Affaires'
July 1963	Upgrade to 'Legation'
January 1980	Upgrade to 'Embassy'
November 1980 (Israel's annexation of east Jerusalem)	Downgrade to 'Second Secretary'
March 1992	Upgrade to 'Embassy'
September 2011 (Palmer report regarding the flotilla)	Downgrade to 'Second Secretary'

⁴ Özlem Tür, 2009

⁵ Goren and Lindenstrauss, *ibid.* Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Relations between Turkey and Israel," <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkey-and-israel.en.mfa>.

In 1958, Israel and Turkey signed a secret agreement for broad strategic cooperation. This was part of Israel’s “Alliance of Periphery” with the non-Arab countries in the outer circle of the Middle East – Iran, Ethiopia, and Turkey. The alliance with Turkey lasted until the mid-1960s, when Turkey cooled down its relations with Israel for the benefit of closer ties with the Arab world. The official diplomatic ties between Israel and Turkey were downgraded in 1980, following Israel’s unilateral decision to annex east Jerusalem. Despite Arab pressure to cut all ties with Israel, Turkey and Israel maintained relations at the second secretary level. Since the mid-1980s there was a gradual and slow recovery of the relations, mostly undercover. Only in early 1992, a few months after the Madrid Peace Conference, did Turkey restore full diplomatic ties with Israel. ¹

In summation, relations between Turkey and Israel have been dependent on both internal and external factors. Bilateral relations can be categorized along the lines of identity-oriented and security-oriented paradigms.

Identity-Oriented Paradigm

As a newborn nation, modern Turkey remained neutral to international conflicts, taking into account the recent traumatic events endured by the society during the wars at the end of the nineteenth century that lasted over thirty years until the establishment of the Republic of Turkey⁶

During the early Republican era radical efforts of modernization took place under M. Kemal Atatürk. Simultaneously, on the foreign policy front friendly relations between neighboring countries were instigated in efforts to refrain from regional conflicts –Middle East- and to foster a Westernized identity. Hence, the process of modernization has had substantial impact on foreign policy decisions and perceptions related to an identity conflict. Altunışık and Tür suggest that issues on regional identity and domestic identity have influenced Turkish foreign policy. Authors argue that debates

⁶ Meliha Benli Altunışık, Özlem Tür, Turkey: Challenges of continuity and change, RoutledgeCurzon, London, 2005, p. 91,94. It can be argued that it was natural for Turkey to remain distant from regional and global conflicts as the society did not want to endure another tragedy.

about regional identity are factored into domestic politics.⁷ Issues on identity have been present in Turkey's foreign policy since the emergence of the Turkish Republic. Fostering a Western identity in global politics was a priority. Turkey managed to establish good relations with her neighbours in the Balkans and Middle East, and refrained from interventionist policies.

Turkey and Israel, both non-Arab states, have been long dubbed as the only democracies and modern, secular states in the Middle East.⁸ Turkey's internal dynamics and identity debates have been reflective in Turkey's foreign policy decisions. The Cold War came about at a very critical time in Turkey's identity struggles as the country sought presence amongst Western nations through modernization. During the Cold War, Turkey sided with the Western Camp that also paralleled the modern Turkish identity.⁹ Turkey, in need of the Western allies against the expansionist threats of Soviet Russia, along with other regional and domestic security concerns was inclined to establish a strategic partnership with Israel.¹⁰ During this period Turkey became the first and only state with a majority Muslim population acknowledging the establishment of an Israeli state in the Middle East.¹¹

Witnessing the Turkish government's efforts to collaborate with the Turkish-Jewish Community in order to secure the support of American Jewish organizations in the US, Congress gave a significant boost to the bilateral intergovernmental relations and for the first time publicized openly and positively Turkish-Israeli relations. The first renewed contacts with Jewish organizations were undertaken in 1984 by Prime Minister Özal, with the assistance of the businessman Jak Kamhi. This cooperation covers the period between mid-1988 and end-1992, year of the 500th anniversary of the arrival of Spanish Jews in Ottoman Turkey, which provided the platform for the public relations campaign undertaken by the Quincentennial Foundation.. The desired outcome was to secure the support of the American Jewish Lobby within Congress and by the same token, improve Turkish-Israeli relations¹².

⁷ Meliha Benli Altunışık, Özlem Tür, Turkey: Challenges of continuity and change, RoutledgeCurzon, London, 2005, p. 89.

⁸ Bülent Aras, The Academic Perceptions of Turkish-Israeli Relations, Alternatives, Volume 1, Number 1, Spring 2002, p.7.

⁹ Bülent Aras, Palestinian Israeli Peace Process and Turkey, New York, Nova Science Publishers, 1998, pp. 114-115.

¹⁰ Bülent Aras, The Academic Perceptions of Turkish-Israeli Relations, Alternatives, Volume 1, Number 1, Spring 2002, p.5. (pp.1-17)

¹¹ Ufuk Ulutaş, Turkey-Israel: A Fluctuating Alliance, SETA Policy Brief, No: 42, January 2010, p. 3.

¹² Denis Ojalvo, Turkish Jewish Lobbying, unpublished Master thesis, Galatasaray University, 2005

Security-Oriented Paradigm

Located in a geopolitically instable region, Turkey and Israel have proven to be considerably stable and secure states.¹³ Although relations between Turkey and Israel have proven difficult, dealing with issues such as the Six Day War and Israeli settlements in Palestinians territories, it would be fair to suggest that at most times relations were solid yet cautious. Over the years security concerns for the most part defined Turkish-Israeli relations.¹⁴ It was not only Turkey but also Israel that needed a regional ally against the threat of Islamism, terrorism and regional instability.¹⁵ Politics of fear constituted the core of bilateral relations. Both Turkey and Israel felt marginalized, otherized and isolated. The need for collaboration to survive in the conflict-fuelled Middle East has been a driving force behind the improvement of relations.

Turkish-Israeli relations were considerably heightened during the 1998 post-modern coup d'état, which is described as “strategic partnership”.¹⁶ Developments in Turkish-Israeli relations had a symbolic representation of secularism and modernity, which was an argument employed by the secular political elements in Turkey and impressed by Turkish elite.¹⁷ At that time, bilateral relations were for the most part restricted to elite bureaucracy, mainly military contracts that were disputed by the mostly grassroots -pious fractions- of the Turkish community.¹⁸ Ulutaş defines this as the ‘zenith years’ or ‘honeymoon period’ of bilateral relations.¹⁹

The mid 1990’s represented a period when Turkey faced excessive security threats both domestically and internationally, such as from Syria and Greece resulting in close alignment with Israel.²⁰ As the

¹³ Meliha Benli Altunışık, Özlem Tür, Turkey: Challenges of continuity and change, RoutledgeCurzon, London, 2005, p. 113.

¹⁴ Meliha Benli Altunışık, Özlem Tür, Turkey: Challenges of continuity and change, RoutledgeCurzon, London, 2005, p. 112.

¹⁵ For Turkish threats please see: Meliha Benli Altunışık, Özlem Tür, Turkey: Challenges of continuity and change, RoutledgeCurzon, London, 2005, p. 125.

¹⁶ Ufuk Ulutaş, The 2009 Israeli Elections and Turkish-Israeli Relations, SETA Policy Brief, No.31, February 2009, p. 8.

¹⁷ Mim Kemal Öke, as quoted in Bülent Aras, Palestinian Israeli Peace Process and Turkey, New York, Nova Science Publishers, 1998, p.117.

¹⁸ Bülent Aras, The Academic Perceptions of Turkish-Israeli Relations, Alternatives, Volume 1, Number 1, Spring 2002, p.11.

¹⁹ Ufuk Ulutaş, 2010, p. 4.

²⁰ Bülent Aras, Palestinian Israeli Peace Process and Turkey, New York, Nova Science Publishers, 1998, p. 125.

1990s came to an end, Turkey reduced her security anxieties and tried to find ways to establish dialogue with neighbors instead of an isolationist policy.²¹ After the terrorist attacks on 9/11 the perception of the Middle East and Muslims faced a global change. The reduction of the conflict between the East and West relied upon those that represented both, namely a role model such as Turkey. .²² This new era posed many challenges as well as opportunities to Turkey's position in the Middle East and Europe. The necessity to reach different markets and the eagerness to establish the newly found connection to the past redirected Turkey's strategy to the Middle East. Probably one of the most important underlying reasons is stated by Aras as the geographic proximity of Turkey, which results in Turkey's direct stake in Middle Eastern politics.²³ In fact, Turkey's new policy orientation has been coined as an "axis shift" in the Turkish Foreign Policy and viewed as an Islamic tendency by some Western critics as well as Israeli policy makers.²⁴

Several scholars have pointed out the limitations in the nature of the exchange between Turkey and Israel. It should also be noted that these arguments were predominantly made when Turkish foreign policy was accused of an 'axis shift'. These authors contend that Turkey and Israel have been allies due to security concerns and out of need. Prominent scholar Ofra Bengio suggests that Turkish-Israeli relations have limitations that stem from interdependent social and economic exchanges²⁵. In fact, this study supports Bengio's point that the lack of such exchanges may have possibly served as a limitation. Nonetheless, the results of this study demonstrate that a clear interest in improving economic ties exists among the respondents. This indicates that such limitations can be overcome through recurring social and economic exchanges that currently have a platform for appreciation in Turkey.

Gökhan Bacık discusses the role of desecuritization and democratization in Turkey. Bacık stresses that the interests in Turkey shifted from security to economy as Turkish economy expanded. In fact, Turkish trade has grown exponentially over the past decade and spread out to markets that were traditionally beyond Turkey's reach. Bacık also mentions the role of conservative grassroots and

²¹ Ufuk Ulutaş, The 2009 Israeli Elections and Turkish-Israeli Relations, SETA Policy Brief, No.31, February 2009, p. 9; Ufuk Ulutaş, 2010, p. 8.

²² Joshua W. Walker, Learning Strategic Depth: Implication of Turkey's New Foreign Policy Doctrine, Insight Turkey, Vol.9, Number 3, 2007, p. 32. (pp.32-47).

²³ Bülent Aras, Palestinian Israeli Peace Process and Turkey, New York, Nova Science Publishers, 1998, p.113

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²⁵ Ofra Bengio, Turkey's Strategic U-Turn, Israel's Tactical Mistakes, Haaretz, 11 June 2010

pious businesses that helped shaped the new Turkish economic model. Within this perspective, the interest that was expressed by the respondents of this study indicates that such limitation may no longer exist. More importantly, it also indicates that economic drives have taken center stage in Turkish politics²⁶.

Meliha Altunışık points out that Israel constituted the most controversial aspect of Turkish foreign policy in the post Cold War period. This policy has lost its appeal amongst the youth that were interviewed for this study. The results indicate that cold war era security and identity-based orientation towards Israel no longer has the same appeal due to the Turkish military's loss of grip over politics and Turkey's economic success.

Bülent Aras argues that the bilateral relationship considers culture and identity to be epiphenomenal as variable of secondary importance. On the contrary, this study indicates that there is a certain interest amongst Turkish youth in Israel, Jews and Judaism. In essence, this interest possibly stems from the insularity of the Jewish culture and identity. Nevertheless, growing interest can translate to betterment of bilateral ties if utilized in the right direction with the effective tools.

²⁶ Gökhan Bacık, Turkish-Israeli Relations after Davos: A View from Turkey, Insight Turkey Vol. 11 / No. 2 / 2009 pp. 31-41

2. Survey Analysis

The image of the Jew is a complex one. There is a high degree of curiosity about Israel and Jews. Along these lines, the respondents articulate that Jews are a very insulated and exclusive group. This exclusiveness is possibly one of the reasons that there is limited information on Judaism and Israel that feed stereotypical images. These stereotypical images may not necessarily transform into prejudices, but the study indicates that the perception of exclusiveness raises curiosity.

The respondents have limited knowledge of Israel aside from the Palestinian conflict and the holy city of Jerusalem. Nonetheless, all respondents acknowledge the state of Israel as a reality, a fact on the ground that is not challenged. Its legitimacy is not questioned at any point of the study. Furthermore, Israel is considered the most important country in the Middle East. Hence, Israel's status as a Middle Eastern neighbor is also well established amongst the respondents. In comparison to the 1990s, the image of Israel as a gateway to the Western world is not relevant anymore. Israel is overwhelmingly perceived as a major trade and business partner. Respondents argue that national interest should be the foremost important motivation in engaging with other countries. As such, respondents support Turkey's ties with Israel and would like to see an emphasis on economic ties. Most importantly, there is no mention of Israel as a security-oriented prospect. On the contrary, furthering economic relations are highlighted in multiple interviews. This is all the more interesting in the context of re-securitization of the political agenda where the threat of terrorism is widespread. None of the respondents mention the security-oriented cooperation between Israel and the Turkish armed forces in the late 1990s that strengthened during the 28 February post-modern coup that led to the eviction of the Islamist party in charge.

Most of the respondents use 'Israel' and 'Jew' interchangeably. Similarly, they use Turkish-Israeli relations interchangeably with Turkish-Jewish relations. There is a sense of proximity with Israelis and Jews which stems from a shared geography and experience of living together. Culture and religion are factors of proximity as well as the importance of conservatism within both societies. The Jewish identity is foremost perceived as a religious identity. Having acknowledged similarities between Islam and Judaism, the respondents raise several points that correlate with the stereotypical image of Jews and Israel. The most significant and recurring comment is that Judaism is exclusive

and elitist unlike Islam that is more inclusive. The second recurring point is that Jews are a cursed group according to religious texts. Another point is that the Torah has lost its original form over the centuries and thus Judaism is not practiced in its original form. These perceptions may be stemming from the lack of information on Judaism as well as religious indoctrination. The study also raises interesting points on the interpretation of Turkish identity and how respondents see Jewish identity within the broader sense of ‘Turkishness’. The interviews indicate that Jews are not left outside of the limits of Turkishness. Self-identification of Turkish-Jews also supports this notion. Islam is said to have become an important identity marker for Turks, the fact that Turks had been followers of Judaism throughout history is acknowledged and that there are still few Turkish Jews. The Jewish community of Turkey is indeed the only minority group that uses the adjective ‘Turkish’ in their self-denomination.

Another recurring stereotypical perception is that Jews in Turkey are overwhelmingly well off and are financially very successful. Unlike the first years of the Republic where Jews faced discrimination along with other minorities, within the limits of this study this idea doesn’t lead to the same type of prejudice. In a society where achievement through trade is valued, a Jew is therefore perceived as a potential business partner. Jews are not considered weak and without protection unlike for instance Kurds in the eastern provinces of Turkey. Almost all respondents overwhelmingly acknowledge the situation of Turkish-Jews as difficult. Respondents argue that the treatment of Turkish Jews is interdependent on Israel’s treatment of Palestinians. There is a general knowledge of the Holocaust, however the degree of knowledge has not been determined as part of this study. Denialist discourse is entirely absent. Conservative respondents call for more vigilance against antisemitism.

Zionism is very negatively perceived. The study also indicates a lack of knowledge on what Zionism represents despite the concept being used prolifically. It is perceived as a form of fascism and directly linked to the plight of Palestinians. While the respondents recognize Israel as an independent state, its sovereignty and want to communicate, do business with Jews, they also simultaneously recognize the atrocities against Palestinians. Nevertheless, they believe Israel’s treatment of Palestinians should not be a pre-condition in developing cultural and economic ties with Israel. Similarly, the respondents unanimously say that emotions have no place in foreign policy decision making. Respondents from conservative backgrounds (which include an equal number of persons

who identify themselves as Kurdish) don't see many similarities between the Kurdish and Palestinian questions. The respondents state that in the case of Palestine there is an occupation of land, while for Kurds there is no such occupation. However, several respondents affiliated with left parties compare the two along the lines of human rights abuses. Amongst these respondents, Turkey and Israel are perceived as oppressive states somewhat similar to one another.

Palestine is still considered a key factor in Turkey-Israel relations. The significance of Palestine derives from its perceived connection to Islam and hinges on the notion of justice. Sensitivity on issues related to Palestine is more visible amongst the AKP supporters of the Nationalistic Movement Party (MHP) and of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). One respondent (Emrah) from the AKP lines argue that: 'What makes Palestine so important for me is the cause of Islam and the outright rightfulness of Palestinians. The Palestinian cause is one that signifies justice vs. injustice. Palestine is important for Turkey because Palestine is rightful'.

In summation, the survey results indicate that the trajectory of Turkish-Israeli relations are on the course of a major change leaning towards economic and trade cooperation. The high degree of curiosity about Israel and Jews can serve as a healthy platform in fostering a new bilateral relations context for Turkey and Israel. Whether this potential can be utilized to the full extent depends on multiple domestic and external factors that include the political climate in both countries, political rhetoric, media, security threats and political will to move forward. The following sub sections will elaborate some major findings in the study that will also shed light on the potential for improving Turkish-Israeli relations.

1. Have you ever been to Israel? Would you like to travel to Israel?

Israel is perceived as the most peculiar country in the Middle East, described as the key to understanding the Middle East. Israel is a point of curiosity because it is considered an insular and unknown place. These points factor into the degree of interest and curiosity in Israel. To illustrate, one respondent (Duygu) referring to the protests taking place in Turkey against Israel said that '(I) am curious to learn more about Israel, especially when we protest their Coca-Cola and detergent brand. I want to know who we are actually protesting against'. Similarly another respondent (Murat)

says he wants to visit Israel because of his curiosity about Jewish life. Only one respondent has already been to Israel on a language exchange program.

Israel is recognized as a place to visit. Except for two, all respondents are willing to travel to Israel. Many within the conservative group emphasized that they would like to visit Israel on the very first chance. The country is all the more attractive because of its historical and cultural heritage: the land is the cradle of civilisations and the Holy city of Jerusalem has been a focal point in history, which is reflected in this study as well. Most of the respondents across the political divide would want to visit Israel for the city of Jerusalem. A number of respondent state that Jerusalem is very significant for Islam and thus they would like to visit the city. To illustrate, one respondent said ‘Jerusalem is the first holy site of Islam’. Contrary to general awareness and interest towards Jerusalem, none of the respondents mention globally renowned Israeli cities such as Tel Aviv, Jaffa and Haifa.

Most respondents state that they want to visit Israel because they would like to visit Jerusalem, which is considered a Holy City for the Islamic faith. The reference to Jerusalem and Al Aqsa Mosque and Dome of the Rock are slightly more outspoken within the conservative group. To illustrate, one respondent says: ‘Israel is an important country because of its historically critical location. Israelites view those lands as the promise land. From our perspective –Islam- those lands are holy lands. For that reason, I would like to go there, visit this religiously important place and practice my faith’. This study indicates that the idea and notion of Jerusalem as a holy site is an important factor in the respondents’ desire to visit Israel. For example, one respondent from the Justice and Development Party (AKP) lines said ‘Jerusalem is very important for us Muslims and the two other monotheistic religions. But, Jerusalem has been a Muslim site since Selahattin Eyyubi and we believe it will remain to be so. That is why, as every other Muslim, I have sensitivity over issues related to Jerusalem’. There is religious sensitivity over Jerusalem, especially amongst the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and AKP supporters as well as the respondents from the other end of the spectrum that perceive Jerusalem from a religious perspective. Nonetheless, both respondent groups acknowledge the multicultural characteristics and heritage of Jerusalem and Israel.

The fact that Jerusalem is also very important for Muslims is underlined by a number of respondents. Beyond the pilgrimage, there is an interest in religiosity. An interviewee of the secular group thinks a visit to Israel can help understand the impact of religion on individuals. Another respondent from the conservative group wants to better understand the Jews of Turkey and see how they live.

The third reason that motivates the desire to visit Israel relates to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The reference to the conflict is present in both groups. A visit to Israel can help *'look at the conflict through the eyes of Israelis'*, to *'analyze the effects of the occupation'*, or *'to make the difference between Israeli citizens and the State of Israel'*. Differentiation between the state and its citizens is an important concept for the leftist respondents who traditionally tend to be highly suspicious towards any state structure.

Two respondents (one person from each group) refuse to travel to Israel because of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the occupation. The leftist respondent refuses to travel to a country *'where the state is murdering the most innocent ones'*, the second respondent from the conservative group thinks that even Jerusalem will soon be destroyed as a result of the conflict and the occupation. The third person, reluctant to travel to Israel, is originally from Diyarbakir and is member of a leftist group. He doesn't consider the Middle East a tourist destination. He says he would not consider travelling to countries such as Israel or Iraq but to places such as South Italy or Norway. The occupation is a concern for both groups. The idea that there is a lesson to be learned from Israel seems to be more powerful as expressed by this conservative interviewee: *'Jerusalem is under occupation, but Israel's external trade relations are highly developed, Tel-Aviv is an important center in international trade, I would like to go and see how a country in conflict with its neighbours could achieve that much'*. Israel is perceived as an interesting model by this *'trading generation'*.

2. Sources of information on Israel

Press, including the international press broadcasting in Turkish is a main source of information. Academic sources and United Nations (UN) publications are also the primary sources of information. The fact that respondents are students or new graduates may explain the importance of these sources. Social media and friends are more often mentioned sources of information within the conservative group. The religious source is primarily the Torah for the leftist group and the Koran for the

conservative group. One conservative interviewee acknowledges the bias that can stem from reading religious text. Interestingly, Jewish writers and musicians are among the sources of information for one of the conservative interviewees.

Generally speaking, most of the respondents think they are not well informed or knowledgeable enough about Israel. Only a few respondents believe that they know enough information to reach a judgement about Israel. These respondents are the ones with the most critical approach towards Israel and a dogmatic worldview. The sense of not being well-informed is explained by way of the general sense of suspicion towards press outlets, the desire to be analytical, and the lack of direct interest in Israeli news.

3. Have you ever had any contact with an Israeli or a Jew? Would you consider working with an Israeli citizen or a Jew?

The proportion of respondents who had been in touch with an Israeli or a Jew is higher in the secular group. Eight out of fifteen have already had a contact with an Israeli or a Jew in a professional context although the depth of their exchange has not been explored as a part of this study. Only two in the conservative group have had contact with an Israeli or a Jew: one had an exchange with an Israeli in virtual space that proved to be a bad experience, the other one's father had an Israeli business partner.

Ethnic and religious identity wouldn't matter for the selection of a business partner for nearly all the respondents. According to the respondents, individuals matter more than group identity. Personal confidence is particularly important for the conservative group; trust and confidence building are the only criteria in the selection of a business partner. Generally speaking, Jews and Israelis are perceived as being particularly talented in trade. In this respect, identity seems to introduce a positive bias.

Two respondents, one conservative and the other secular, consider it a problem doing business with a Zionist or someone who has 'fascist views' on the Palestinian. Another secular interviewee would

not want to do business with a conservative person. An MHP member said he would prefer having a Turkish partner and underlined having preferred his Jewish boss over his Muslim boss while working abroad within a work and travel program.

4. Turkish and Jewish cultures: perceived similarities and differences

The Jewish identity is perceived mainly as a religious identity. Having acknowledged the lack of information on the ‘Jewish culture’, both cultures are considered close because of the geographical proximity and a long history of living together. The sense of proximity comes from geography and history is more strongly emphasized by the conservative respondents. These respondents highlighted for instance that, there are Jews in Turkey and Jews lived in larger numbers for centuries on Anatolian lands and underlined that ‘*if Islam has become an important identity marker for Turks, Turks and Jews should develop a similar identity under one roof of the same state*’. The discussion on similarities between Turks and Jews leads interestingly to the conclusion (in a few interviews) that in the Middle Eastern context, Turks are perceived closer to Jews than to Arabs. The discussions ultimately allude to the issue of the possible Turkishness of some Jews. Karaim Turks, a Turkish tribe that converted to Judaism in the 7th century is a case in point. One respondent highlights that not all Jews are Israelis and not all Muslims are Arabs. Hence, religion is indeed a factor that brings together and serves as a factor of proximity.

5. Judaism and Islam: perceived similarities and differences

The study confirms that religion is seen as a factor of proximity. Almost all respondents say that Judaism and Islam are compatible to a certain degree, perhaps more than Islam and Christianity. As two Abrahamic religions, respondents state that Islam and Judaism share similarities as well as differences. When probed to list the similarities the respondents fall short of giving specific examples or rituals. Nevertheless, they cite similarities such as the conservative nature of both faiths, monotheism, fasting, the status of women, circumcision, keeping kosher/halal and sins. The similarities don’t expand to actual religious rituals; respondents cannot explain how Judaism and Islam are specifically practiced on the ground. On the other hand, Judaism is perceived to be more

exclusive and tribal or prescribed to a certain tribe. Respondents claim and acknowledge that they have limited information on Judaism.

The secular group more specifically highlights similarities arising from the perceived impact of religion on social life and the external signs of religiosity in both countries. The conservative group underlines similarities in religious practices and rituals. Proximity is seen as natural since the two monotheistic religions are believed to stem from the same source and have flourished in the same geography. The respondents argue that while having similarities, Islam is open to all and is equalitarian as opposed to Judaism, which was delivered to Israelites. Furthermore, the respondents argue that Judaism is perceived as elitist and projects a sense of superiority as opposed to Islam, which is recognized as more democratic due to its universal message. A reference made by one of the respondents (from the conservative group) to the Turkish historian Ilber Ortayli, who qualified Islam as ‘universal Judaism,’ summarizes the respondents’ perceptions of the similarities and differences between the two religions. Another aspect, more secondary since it is not equally emphasized within both groups, is the notion that Jews corrupted the original message, which explains why the ‘sons of Israel’ as referred to in the Koran ‘have been cursed’. The Koran has rectified the message. A discussion on the different status of Prophets in Islam and Judaism leads to the questioning of the reason why Jews don’t recognize ‘Mohammed.’ The hypothesis put forward is ‘because Mohammed is Arab and that Jews are waiting for a (new) Jewish Prophet’.

6. How should it be to live in Turkey as a Jew?

The question whether it should be difficult to be a Jew or live as a Jew in Turkey today leads to a complex picture. Participants in this study unanimously agree that living as a Jew in Turkey would not be an easy task. Initially, answers underline that there are Jews living in Turkey – the community is seen as larger than it is in reality. It is believed that some Jews are hiding their identity, which is a sign that living as a Jew in Turkey should be challenging. Living as a Jew should be as living like any other minority, probably not much different than living as an Alevi or Armenian, as perceived by one of the secular interviewees. One of the conservative respondents highlights that life in the Republican period had been difficult for all believers, for Sunni Muslims, Alevi Muslim, Jews and Christians. One respondent along the AKP lines (Emrah) says ‘Jews can live peacefully as long as

they respect Turkey's values'. In this respect, as argued by some CHP aligned respondents Turkish-Jews are inclined to live 'under the radar' and tend to blend in with the majority population as to not draw too much attention to their Jewishness.

Respondents that define themselves more along the lines of MHP and AKP recall the Ottoman-Jewish heritage and common history. This means there is public consciousness about Jewish heritage and history in Turkey and its predecessor, the Ottoman Empire. The reference to a shared past is made all the more easier that this past is not conflictual and not controversial with regard to official historiography. These respondents argue that Ottoman subjects of Jewish heritage lived peacefully under Ottoman rule due to Ottoman benevolence. As the respondents along the more conservative lines discuss Jewish-Ottoman heritage, it appears that Turkey's most recent opening towards its minorities, including the restoration of the Grand Edirne Synagogue and the public Hanukkah celebration in Istanbul, has had impact to some degree. One respondent specifically mentioned the Hanukkah celebration that took place in January 2016 in Istanbul citing the common bonds between Turks and Jews. The respondent (Esra) who self-identifies as religious with no political affiliation says: 'Hannukah was celebrated in Istanbul for the first time in Turkish Republic history and a synagogue that was closed for 65 years was inaugurated...These steps demonstrate that living in Turkey as a Jew is in fact a good thing and it will get better'. Another respondent (Meryem) who also mentions the Holocaust remembrance activities and Hanukkah celebrations says, 'Events such as these will inevitably have a positive affect on Turkish-Israeli relations'.

Yet, the 'Jew' is still not a part their world, unlike probably the Alevis or even the Armenians. Even if living as a Jew in one's given socio-cultural context seems challenging, it seems likely that Jews should be much better off in places where they have stronger roots. Respondents of both groups perceive Jews as an elite group from a socio-economic point of view. They are, affluent, unlike most Kurds that are destitute. In this respect, life even as a minority group member shouldn't be that difficult as long as one doesn't have to '*mix up with the populace*', or as described by another interviewee, one can qualify as a '*free mason white Turk*'.

As stated previously, almost all respondents overwhelmingly acknowledge the situation of Turkish-Jews as difficult. Respondents argue that the treatment of Turkish Jews is interdependent on Israel's

treatment of Palestinians. For instance, one respondent (Zeynep), affiliated with the Gülen Movement says, ‘I believe the events in recent years –Mavi Marmara, One Minute- have made things more difficult for Turkish-Jews. Turks have a tendency to make generalizations and given that, I think it must to difficult to live in Turkey as a Jew’. However, having said that most respondents believe it should be separate issues. One respondent says: ‘Everything was going very well for centuries until Israel’s offense against Palestine’. While participants recognize that living in Turkey as a Jew can be quite difficult at times, the overall perception is that Turkey’s multi-cultural past enables Jews to live peacefully in Turkey. To illustrate, one respondent (Meryem) says: ‘Turkey- is a country that has been home to many civilizations, there shouldn’t be any problem’. Interesting enough, the discourse of leftist respondents seems to be more radical. According to these respondents living as a Jew in Turkey is understood as living as an Israeli in Turkey. Aggressive Israeli policies directly affect Israelis, as people can’t easily distinguish between those who support and do not support the policies of Israel towards Palestinians. This brings forth the question of whether it is easier to live as a Muslim in Israel. The MHP interviewee who has already been to Israel believes that being a Turk or Muslim in Israel is easier than being a Jew in Turkey. Respondents of the conservative group express their concern because of the rising antisemitic rhetoric.

7. Turkish-Israeli intergovernmental relations

The respondents unanimously state that diplomacy is a key tool in solving problems. Dialogue and mediation channels should always be kept open. Priority is rather given to realpolitik considerations. One respondent (Duygu) asserts that ‘you don’t need to like anyone, you can talk to them as long it serves your national interest’. The study results indicate that national interest should be the driving force of the conduct of external relations in the absence of emotions and that Israel as the most powerful country in the Middle East should matter for Turkey. Interestingly, the military dimension is entirely absent despite the re-securization of the Turkish mainstream political discourse. At the time of this research, Israel matters not as a military ally, but as a trade partner. Israel is foremost discerned as an economic power. Only a MHP interviewee refers critically to strategic cooperation. Israel is seen as a Middle Eastern country, there is barely any reference to Israel as a gateway to the West. Furthermore, the development of relations with Israel matters especially because Israel is a regional country, in the neighbourhood where Turkey isolated.

The development of relations between Turkey and Israel is also considered within both groups as potentially beneficial to minorities in Israel and Turkey. Above all, building good relations with Israel is considered a prerequisite to efficiently supporting Palestinians. The respondents believe that improvement of ties between Turkey and Israel will benefit Palestine and the Palestinian cause. This is prevalent significantly amongst the MHP and AKP aligned respondents. Only one interviewee, affiliated with MHP, has a single reservation. According to this respondent, the flotilla incident is the main issue that hampers bilateral relations and is considered a matter of national pride. The effects of the dispute between the government and the Fethullah Gulen movement also need to be factored in. Respondents with sympathies to the Gülen movement are highly critical of the populist statements of the government on the Palestinian issue.

8. The impact of the development of relations between Turkey and Israel

Respondents focus first on the societal reactions that full normalization of relations would trigger, despite the question asked about impacts. Both groups share the idea that the development of relations would face a societal resistance. Respondents from the leftist organizations argue that the resistance would be much less if the AKP is in the driving seat and that, as a result of the further development of relations with Israel, political Islam and Islamist fanaticism would lose ground. Conservative respondents express this idea differently; they feel that the improvement of bilateral relations will help counter antisemitism and ‘Jews in Turkey will feel better in Turkey’. Secular respondents instead talked about the development of people-to-people contacts. Conservative respondents refer to the positive societal impact of Holocaust remembrance activities. The further development of relations can open up new avenues for such activities. It seems clear that the economic impact will be positive.

Anti-Israeli Facebook pages

Today, with the proliferation of social media usage among people of all ages, Facebook pages offer a fast and cost-free environment connecting people across the globe and empowering the youth in an unprecedented way. Sharing comments and photos are high in number and controls are done in case of complaint; as a consequence, people feels safe to "freely" share their thoughts. However, this comfort often transforms into hatred, swearing and threatening remarks on pages created due to irritation or anger. The most obvious examples are seen on pages against Israel.

There are dozens of different pages opened against Israel. The most popular of these pages has around 13,000 likes. It is possible to examine the pages opened against Israel under three groups. The first group of Facebook pages is usually followed by left-wing people. These pages are about boycotting Israel where news and articles are shared frequently. No insulting comments and responses were found on these pages. The second group of Facebook pages is generally formed by the Islamic community, which often includes religious postings. Almost all of these pages contain hate speech, fear mongering and discourse that would globally be considered anti-semitic. These pages contain sourceless photos, such as a wounded baby. In addition to posts about Israel and Palestinians, these pages also contain postings about domestic policy. Additionally, these pages include frequent quotations from the Holy Koran. Also, some comments related to the Third Reich and anti-Semitic quotes from Hitler are also posted on these pages. Almost all consumer brands widely used in Turkey are listed as "Israeli goods" and calls for boycott are posted. The third group of Facebook pages is about products with GMO (Genetically Modified Organisms). These pages contain articles and news posted by the page administrators, which discuss the modified seeds bought from Israel. Although these pages are expected to be non-political, comments still contain hate speech.

The search of "Israel" as a keyword yielded numerous pages and likes, whereas the search of "Palestine" and "Gaza" as keywords yielded fewer results. On the pages related to Palestine and Gaza, most postings were in support of Hamas and against Israel instead of the political, economic and social situation in Palestine or Gaza.

The opening date of these pages implies that the Israeli-Palestinian agenda directly influences the political undertone of the postings. The research indicates that political crises trigger users to open



new Facebook pages. New pages reach thousands of followers in a very short period. Most of these pages seem to either stop or reduce the number of sharings after the Israeli-Palestinian issue is off of the agenda, while only few of them continue posting articles. Nevertheless, not sharing anything does not lead to a decrease in the number of likes these pages receive. This situation induces us to think that people prefer these pages not because of the contents, but because of the page titles. However, it is interesting that a number of pages containing the names "Palestine" and "Gaza" and their number of likes are very few. Usually these pages were opened in the name of the Palestine Liberation Organization and Mavi Marmara. The total likes of the most popular page are approximately 32,000 people, and the number of likes of the second most popular page are about 11,000 people. Other pages have the number of likes between 1,000 and 4,000. The contents of these pages display that people have the tendency to share anger, rather than helping each other and sharing pain. The purpose of creating these pages is to encourage taking a side and maintain a status quo rather than being informed about the issue.

For Facebook pages, following-up and removing the sharings and comments that contain hate speech is quite burdensome in terms of time and effort. Until recently, no criminal sanction had been applied for detected defamation and cursing, unless the person himself had made a complaint. This situation has changed recently. In 2014, 4 protesters who shouted "Damn with Israel!" slogans in front of the Israeli Embassy Residence in 2014, received a total of 20 months imprisonment. This development is a significant step in demonstrating the repercussions of hate speech as a crime regardless of content, intensity, location and time.

Seval Kk

* In this article, Facebook pages containing the names of "Israel", "Palestine" and "Gaza" and having more than 1,000 likes are taken as a basis.

Perceptions of Israel as a sympathizer of Milli Grş



The movement Milli Görüş was founded in 1969 with a manifesto published by Necmettin Erbakan that emphasized the moral and spiritual strength of Islam and explained the decline of the Muslim world as a result of its incorporation of Western values. Adopting a classical anti-Western and anti-colonialist stance, he devoted much attention to issues such as economic development, independence and issued industrialization warnings against further rapprochement with the West, calling instead for closer economic ties with Muslim countries. The name of Milli Görüş would remain associated with a religio-political movement and a series of parties promoting political Islam inspired by Necmettin Erbakan, today the Saadet Party that clearly stands in opposition to the ruling AK Party. The word Milli traces back to the Qur'anic notion of "Millet" which often appears in association with the Prophet Abraham (community/way of Abraham milletu Ibrahim). The concept of "Millet" denotes a community that gathers around a prophet and the values he conveys, expressed as justice, mercy, awe of the creator, and the equality of human beings. It does not refer to a nation or an ethnicity. The second element "Görüş" means "opinion", "view" or "perception".

The movement is active mainly in European countries and especially in Germany through the network of the Islamic Community of Milli Görüş. The youth movement of Milli Görüş is structured around the Anadolu Gençlik Derneği (Anatolian Youth Association).

Necmettin Erbakan expressed the '*fight against Zionism*' he defined as '*racist imperialism*' and support to the Palestinian cause as the foremost priority of the Milli Görüş movement, considering the '*liberation of Palestine would be the liberation of the entire community of believers*'²⁷. The 'Jerusalem rally' organized in 1980 in Konya was an important milestone in the political mobilization of the movement. In 1996-1997, Necmettin Erbakan as the head of the coalition government engaged extensively with the Israeli government.

The Milli Görüş sympathizer the project team has interviewed, describes himself as a liberal before joining Milli Görüş. He is planning to travel to Israel, because he wants to visit Palestine. His main sources of information on Israel are religious sources and social media. He thinks that the Turkish and Jewish cultures should be alike since religion has a central role in both. He never had any contact with an Israeli, however he says he can imagine himself in an Israeli environment. He thinks that

²⁷ http://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/Erbakan_Hoca_ve_Filistin_Davasi/354949



Israeli society is very cosmopolitan and thereby claims that he can ‘*do business with liberal Jews and live together with Orthodox Jews*’. On questions regarding similarities and differences between İslam and Judaism, he responded, ‘Prophets are common, but they don’t recognize our Prophet’ and considers the practice of Judaism as racist. He thinks that ‘*Jews in Turkey have been negatively affected by the general mistrust towards minorities that developed as a result of the role they had played in the destruction and the division of the fatherland*’; he nevertheless considers that Turkey should have improved the situation of Jews because ‘*as true believers we should not oppress non Muslims*’ and not ‘*treat them as they treat Palestinians*’.

His radical views about the State of Israel and the future of Turkish-Israeli intergovernmental relations differentiate him from other conservative respondents. His views are rather more similar to one of the respondents of a far left party.

Mehmet İlhanlı

3. Israel is foremost a trade partner: business consolidates the bilateral relations and opens up new opportunities for inter-societal interactions

The perception of Israel as a major trade partner and a potential business partner from our interviewees is verified by facts. Israel is indeed an important economic partner for Turkey. The progressive decoupling between economics and politics are in line with the liberalization of trade and the strengthening of the private sector.

Contrary to the situation in the past decades where bilateral Turkish-Israeli relations lacked ‘interdependent social and economic exchanges’(ie Bengio), economic relations helped to establish a well-integrated web of private interests constituting the strongest bond between the two countries and societies.

The trade volume between Turkey and Israel is at its highest level, which marks an all-time high point that surpasses by far the volumes during the heyday of Turkish-Israeli ties. Trade continues to thrive despite the sharp deterioration of political ties. The total trade volume has doubled since 2009 despite lingering diplomatic tensions in the context of the 2008-09 Gaza war. Trade increased by 25% between 2009 and 2010.

In 2014, the bilateral trade volume equaled 5.6 billion USD compared with 2.7 billion USD in 2009. Turkish exports to Israel jumped to \$2.92 billion in 2014 from \$1.5 billion in 2009, while imports from Israel increased to \$2.7 billion from \$1.1 billion in the same period. The trade data published by the Turkish Statistics Institute and confirmed in Israel has not been unnoticed in Turkey. Media commentators expressed surprise at the lack of correlation between politics and economics. Opposition parties, Peoples’ Republican Party (CHP) and Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) criticized the government for hypocrisy in its pro-Palestinian rhetoric; ‘AKP criticism of Israel’s actions was nothing more than populism and called on the government to revise trade ties with Israel²⁸. Islamist circles echoed the criticisms of the opposition parties and highlighted that trade

²⁸http://www.todayszaman.com/anasayfa_turkish-israeli-trade-booms-despite-bitter-rhetoric-against-israel_372021.html

between Turkey and Israel has been steadily developing since the AK Party came to power in 2002²⁹. The trade volume has increased by 429% between 2002 and 2014 and the bilateral trade volume with Israel has surpassed the trade volume with Muslim countries and the Turkish world.

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics of Israel, in 2015 Turkey was Israel's 9th export market and ranked 7th among its main import countries. Israel is Turkey's 13th export market. Israel's contribution to Turkish trade might not be significant quantitatively, but business relations with Israel matter qualitatively. Contrary to trade with other Middle Eastern countries, Turkish exports to Israel are highly diversified. They supply a wide range of sectors in semi-processed goods.

The government and the business community expressed support for further development of economic relations with Israel. Business has become an area immune from political upheavals that carries its own dynamics. Economic cooperation developed throughout the 50's with the support of both governments and remained highly sensitive to regional politics in the 80's. Nowadays with the decoupling between economics and politics, business pragmatism is trumping political tensions.

In July 2014, in the context of Israeli military operations targeting Gaza, Turkey's trade with Israel became an issue of polemics. Bülent Arınç³⁰ underlines that in the liberal and globalized economic system, the private sector is the driving force behind trade with Israel and mentioned that trade data with Israel was also embracing trade with Palestine. The President of the Assembly of Exporters,' Mehmet Büyükekşi, stated that access to Palestine goes through Israel, and that the Turkish private sector has to use Israeli ports, airports and roads to connect with Palestine and pointed to the importance of separating business from politics³¹. The President of the Istanbul Exporters' Union of chemical products, Murat Akyüz, expressed his support highlighting that a boycott against Israel would definitely hurt Palestine. Trade with Palestine represents, however, a tiny portion of the

²⁹<http://t24.com.tr/haber/mhp-basbakan-israile-lanet-okurken-oglu-gemileriyle-yuk-tasiyor,264897>,
http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/siyaset/38075/_Erdogan_in_oglu_ne_zamandir_israil_e_tasima_isi_yapiyor_.html,
<https://halkinhikmeti.wordpress.com/2014/08/07/ticaret-yaresullullah/>,
<http://www.samanyoluhaber.com/ihh-baskanindan-flas-sozler-haberi/1215318/>

³⁰ Arınç'tan İsrail'le Ticaret Savunması', *Dünya Bülteni*, 23.7.2014

³¹ <http://haber.star.com.tr/ekonomi/israile-ticaret-kesilirse-filistin-zora-girer/haber-914493>
20/07/2014

overall trade volume. The trade volume between Turkey and Palestine was 29,8 million USD in 2009 and 93,5 million USD in 2014, consisting largely of Turkish exports. The Minister of Economy, Nihat Zeybekci, expressed eloquently in this same context his reproof of any call for boycott of Jewish products underlying that *“any discriminatory approach on the basis that a product is Jewish would be entirely in contradiction with our history, heritage and faith. Look at the international markets, there is nothing such as a Muslim, Jewish or Christian commodity. The bilateral trade volume between Turkey and Israel has reached 5 billion. Turkish and Jewish companies will continue their cooperation.”*³²

A couple of months later in May 2015, The President of the Assembly of Exporters’ of Turkey (TIM) Büyükekşi highlighted that trade with Israel is as resilient to political tensions as trade with France and Italy³³.

The free market has won over politics thanks to the free trade agreement. The free trade agreement (FTA) between Turkey and Israel was signed in May 1996 and enters into force in May 1997. According to the Israel-Turkey Business Council, which promotes business ties between Israeli companies seeking opportunities in Turkey, there are about 900 Israeli companies that do work in or with Turkey. They mostly operate in joint ventures with Turkish companies, making their Israeli identities invisible. The extensive business connections are largely camouflaged because many Israeli businesses use their Turkish partner companies to sell to the Arab world while Turkish companies use their Israeli partners as a gateway to American markets. Geographical proximity plays in favor of Turkish producers. Turkey can provide the basic products that the Israeli economy needs and benefits from the Israeli commercial policy. The competitiveness of the Israeli construction sector and heavy industry is low; the small size of the national market did not allow for the development of a private sector able to break state monopolies. Israel is among few countries, which have an FTA both with the EU and the U.S. The Turkish-Israeli FTA offers Turkey a gateway to the American market. Iron, steel, automotive products, oil and oil products, electrical machinery, chemicals, building materials, ready-wear products and metal goods are the main products exported from Turkey to Israel. There has been a rise in exports from Turkey of plastics, textiles, semi-

³² <http://www.sozcu.com.tr/2014/gundem/allah-israile-afet-vermesin-565907/>

³³ TIM Başkanı Büyükekşi: İsrail ile ticaret olumsuz etkilenmez, <http://semshaber.com/turkiye-israil-ticaretinde-durmak-yok-yola-devam/>

precious stones and transportation equipment. Israel exports plastics, chemicals and agriculture products to Turkey.

The innovative capacity of the Israeli economy is particularly significant. Many companies have a high specialization in the field of research and development and are looking for partners in developing new products and implementing new technologies. The geographical proximity makes Turkey almost local market. From computer software to water irrigation systems, IT, and medical equipment, Israel provides access to technology for the Turkish economy. Israeli companies, especially in the agricultural and water technology industry provide equipment to local Turkish governments. Indeed, cell phones, personal computers and plasma televisions are made using parts and technology from Tel Aviv. Most of the software Turks use in everything from cell phones to medical equipment is made in Israel.

The trade route from Turkey to the Gulf region transits through Israel and Jordan as the traditional routes via Iraq and Syria were severed as a result of conflicts. The opening of the ro-ro connection between the ports of Iskenderun, in the Hatay province of Turkey and Haifa onwards to El Khalil opened a new transit route from Turkey to the Gulf region. More recently, the decision of the Israeli government to allow Turkish trucks to enter Israeli roads has made the transport corridor more cost efficient³⁴. The logistics sector of Hatay, which had the highest number of trucks after Istanbul and ensured Turkey's connection with the Middle East and the Gulf region via Syria, welcomed the initiative. Headlines in the local press read *'Turkey and Israel bound together by sea'*.

Advocates of Turkish-Israeli relations

Hapoalim Bank, Israel's biggest bank owns 57.5% of the shares of BankPozitif and has become a player in the Turkish banking sector. NETAFIM, one of Israel's major agricultural and water technology companies is producing in Adana. In 2007, Israeli company Teva, the world's largest maker of generic pharmaceuticals, completed the acquisition of Turkey's Med Ilaç through a

³⁴ <http://www.halkinhabercisi.com/iskenderundan-Israile-ticari-gemi-seferleri-basladi>

transaction estimated at tens of millions of dollars, putting Teva at the heart of what economists believe is a billion-dollar market of generic pharmaceuticals in Turkey³⁵.

The biggest Turkish investor in Israel is Zorlu Group. Zorlu Energy took a 25 percent share in Dorad in 2003 to undertake investment, contracting, operation, and maintenance services for the 840MW combined-cycle, natural gas power plant project in Ashkelon, Israel. This power plant is the largest ever built by a private investor in Israel. Other investments were commissioned in Israel, namely the 55-megawatt Ashdod and the 120-megawatt Ramat Negev natural gas power plants, with 42% share of Zorlu Energy. Therefore, the Zorlu Group will be supplying 7 percent of Israel's energy for the next 25 years. Recently the news was released that the Zorlu Holding is conducting work on a pipeline worth \$2.5 billion to transfer natural gas to Turkey that was discovered in Israel's Leviathan field. The undersea delivery system is expected to transfer 8 billion cubic meters of natural gas per year³⁶.

The Turkish company Yilmazlar Construction Group has been operating in Israel since 1993. The company is a major player in the Israeli construction sector, currently employing more than seven hundred Israelis. The company faced difficulties obtaining work permits for some 1200 Turkish workers and engineers³⁷.

Local and sectoral level

New stakeholders and advocates emerged at the grassroots level in the business community as trade relations with Israel developed. The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Bursa (BSTO) has become a strong advocate for further development of Turkish-Israeli relations. Bursa is a major production center for the automotive sector, which is an important exporter to Israel³⁸. According to

³⁵ DEİK İsrail Ülke Bülteni, Nisan 2014

³⁶ <http://www.dailysabah.com/energy/2014/05/22/turkeys-zorlu-holding-to-build-natural-gas-pipeline-from-israel-to-turkey>

³⁷ <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/israil-de-faaliyet-gosteren-turk/ekonomi/detay/2127203/default.htm>

³⁸ Türkiye-İsrail Ticaret Hacmi Tarihi Rekor Kırdı, 26 May 2015, <http://www.aktifhaber.com/turkiye-israil-ticaret-hacmi-tarihi-rekor-kirdi-1176274h.htm>

the Israel Country Report³⁹ published by the BTSO, 426 companies based in Bursa are exporting to Israel and 4 Israeli companies are established in Bursa. The OYAK-Renault's plant in the Turkish city of Bursa had manufactured for a short period of time the world's first electric cars, Fluence Z.E., mainly for the Israeli market.

The Mediterranean Exporters' Union of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables has become an important advocate for further development of the bilateral relations. Companies affiliated with the Union have witnessed an increase in their exportations to Israel by 180 times in 2015. The total value of exports raised from 45,000 USD in 2014 to 8 million USD in 2015. The increase has been all the more remarkable due to lack of accessibility of other regional markets⁴⁰.

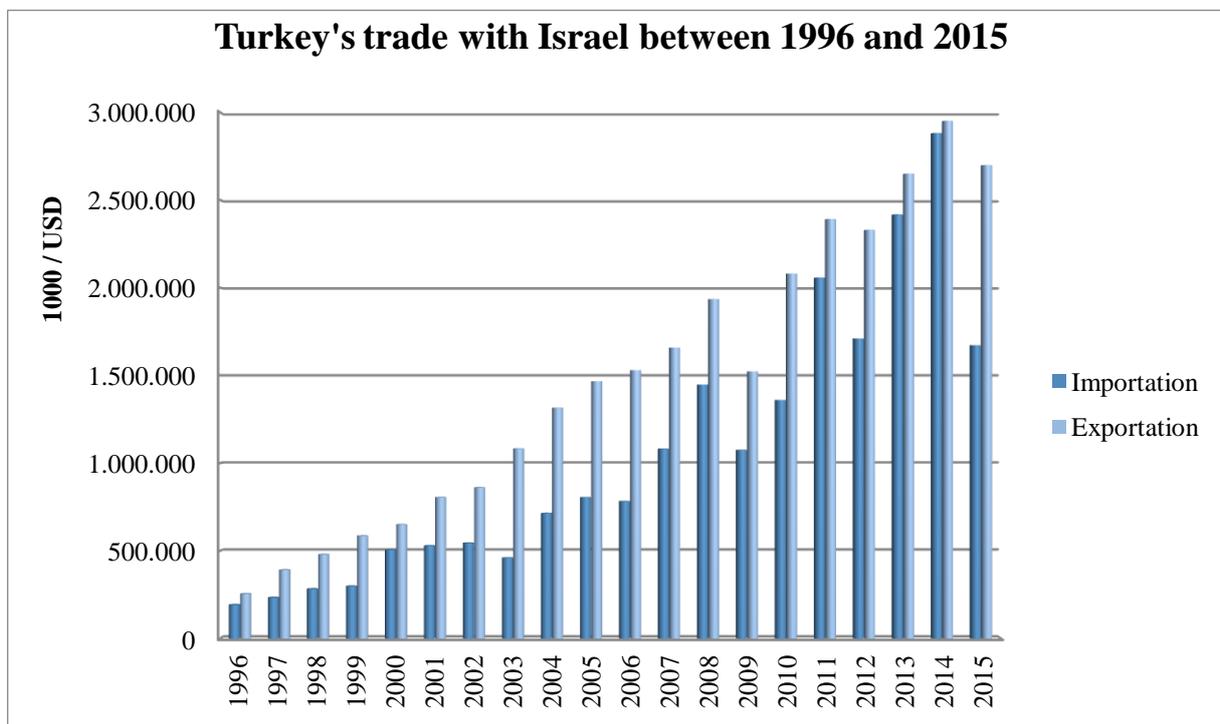
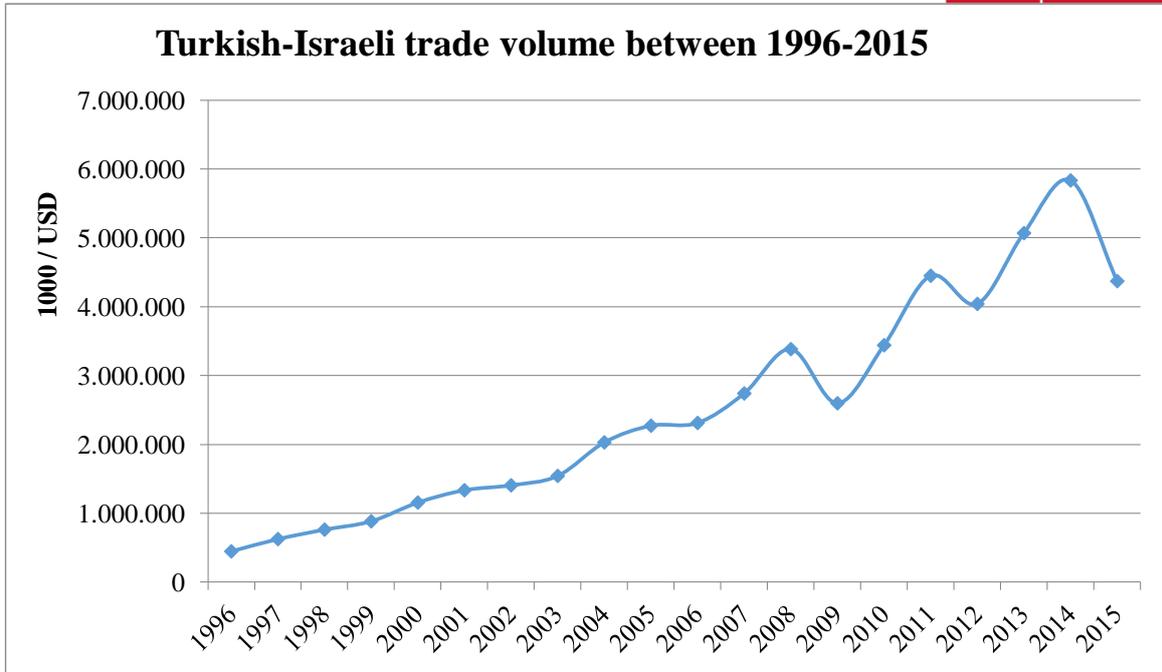
The Russian Federation started implementing a trade embargo against fresh fruits and vegetables imported from Turkey as of 1 January 2016. The sanctions have had a real impact on the export of fresh fruits and vegetables, especially Antalya, a province that mainly produces fresh fruits and vegetables. Exports from Antalya to Russia have increased by 86% between January 2015 and January 2016. On the sectoral base, in January 2016, exports of fresh fruits and vegetables to Russia decreased by 86.83% and the total exports by 38.62%. Israel has become the alternative for the sector of fresh fruits and vegetables. In January 2016, exports of fresh fruits and vegetables skyrocketed; they increased by 4043.72%, amounting to 2.7 million USD.

The Izmir Trade Chamber (ITO) is eager to develop relations with Israel. In April 2015, a large business delegation of ITO visited to take part in the agricultural technologies fair for prospective business opportunities. The President of the Board of ITO Ekrem Demirtaş highlighted the long history of relations between Izmir and Israel, and mentioned that Jews lived for centuries in İzmir together with people of different faiths, Jewish businessmen were among the founders of ITO, and the socioeconomic contribution of the Jewish community has always been very important. According to ITO, there are 27 Israeli owned companies in Izmir expected to increase the trade volume with Israel, which is currently at 270 million USD. ITO provided extensive publicity during its trip to Israel⁴¹.

³⁹ Bursa, İsrail Ülke Raporu

⁴⁰ <http://www.ajans5.com/turkiyeninyukselenkomsusuisrail2915h.html>

⁴¹ <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/ito-dan-israil-e-ticaret-gezisi-izmir-yerelhaber-755238/>



Data compiled by the authors, source: Turkish Statistical Institute

Tourism

The 1990's also witnessed a constant increase in the volume of Israeli tourism to Turkey. The Turkish Mediterranean beaches became the most favored tourist destinations for Israelis.

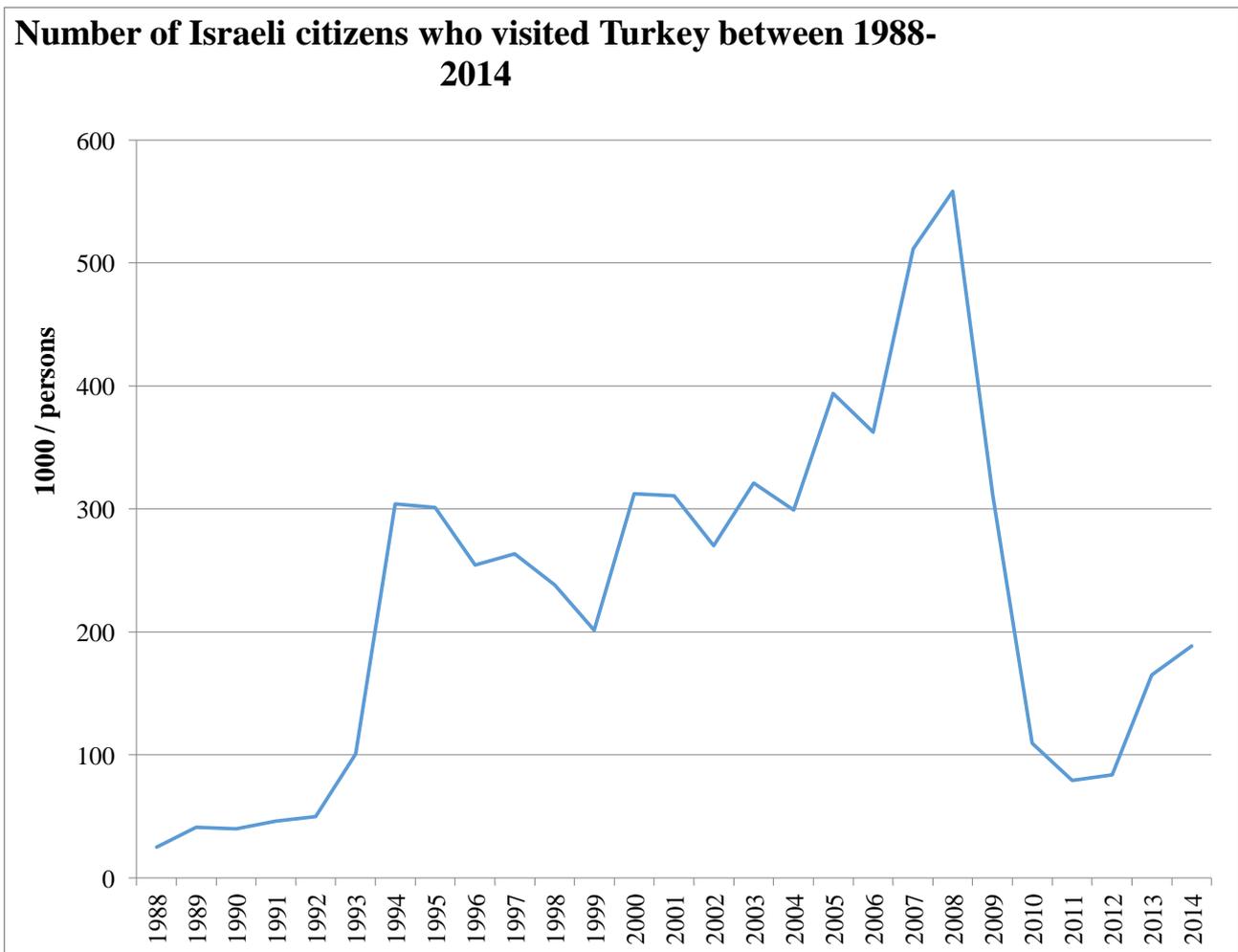
Tourism has been more sensitive to political tensions. Turkey was once among Israeli tourists' favorite destinations; 331,582 Israelis visited Turkey in 2009. The number fell to 79,000 in 2011 after the Mavi Marmara crisis. In 2011, the number of Israeli tourists fell to 79,000. Air traffic between the two countries has soared by over 150%. In 2014, the number of Israelis having visited Turkey reached 188,608. In 2014, the total number of Turkish flights out of Ben Gurion Airport each week reached 112. This constitutes a 166% increase since 2010. Turkish Airlines is indeed the second carrier after El-Al operating in Israel. Istanbul Ataturk Airport is the major transit place for visitors to and from Israel.

Turkish citizens's visits to Israel increased by 1080% between 2003 and 2007. 3,585 Turkish citizens visited Israel in 2003; in 2007, this number reached 42,312. In the same period, the number of Turkish citizens who travelled abroad increased by 47.64%. The number of Turkish citizens who visited Israel decreased by 74.75% between 2007 and 2008 as tensions between Israel and Hamas exacerbated. The number of visitors further decreased to approximately 5,000 in 2011 and 2012 after the Flotilla incident. The number of visitors has increased since 2013. In 2015, the number of Turkish citizens who visited Israel reached 27,327, while a total of 9.2 million Turkish citizens travelled abroad.

Data compiled by the authors, source: Turkish Statistical Institute

4. Holocaust Education and Remembrance Activities

This chapter offers a glimpse into the Holocaust Education and Remembrance Activities organized in Turkey. Survey respondents referred spontaneously to events organized in the framework of Holocaust Remembrance, particularly to the public candle-lighting ceremony organized by the Beşiktaş Municipality and the Turkish Jewish Community on the occasion of Hanukkah with the participation of state officials on December 13, 2015 in Istanbul.



Holocaust remembrance in Turkey is a recent development, which is still by large confined to the official level. In 2005, then foreign minister Abdullah Gül attended a ceremony in Auschwitz to mark the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the death camp. Although it's been five years of Holocaust Remembrance, these initiatives still lack public participation and are strictly geared towards Turkish-Jewish consumption. Nevertheless, the interviews conducted for this report indicate that there is a growing awareness of Holocaust related events. Many respondents, especially those who define themselves as conservatives, emphasized a need to prevent antisemitism. We underlined in the analysis of the interviews the absence of a denialist discourse and the idea that Turks and Jews have a long history of living together.

Only an impact analysis of Holocaust Education and Remembrance Activities can establish causality between this attitude and the commemoration and education activities. We assume that state ownership of these commemoration events and media coverage attracted have not been unnoticed by most of the young people we interviewed. Furthermore, these events have contributed to shaping the perceptions around Turkish-Jewish and Turkish-Israeli relations.

Turkey has officially committed itself to raising awareness on Holocaust education and anti-Semitism and has been contributing to the activities of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) as an observer country since 2008. For the last six years on every International Holocaust Remembrance Day, January 27, commemoration ceremonies have been organized with the participation of high-level state officials. In 2015 commemorations were particularly memorable. For the first time a ceremony was organized in Ankara with the participation of the Speaker of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, the Minister of Culture and Tourism, the Deputy Ministers of

National Education and National Defense, members of Parliament, high level civil and military officials, academics, students and members of the Turkish Jewish community. On 24 February 2015 for the first time in Turkish history, a ceremony was held in Istanbul with the participation of the Minister of Culture and Tourism, in memory of the Romanian-Jewish refugees that lost their lives on the vessel Struma, which tragically sank in the Black Sea in 1942 after having been kept in Istanbul for several months. Another meaningful event was the re-opening of the Grand Synagogue of Edirne in March 2015. This synagogue was built during the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid II and opened to

worship in 1909. However, it fell into disrepair in the following decades and was finally abandoned in 1983. The Synagogue was transferred to the Directorate General of Foundations in 2008 and the restoration work began in 2010. Deputy Prime Minister and government spokesperson, Mr. Bülent Arınç, delivered a speech at the opening ceremony and stated that Turkish Jews are an integral and fundamental part of Turkish society and made a call to all Jews emigrants to return to their homeland.

Until 2014 the commemoration events in Turkey were held in synagogues. In 2014, the commemoration was, for the first time, held at a place open to the wider public instead of a synagogue. It was organized at Kadir Has University in Istanbul with a wide range of participation including academics, journalists, students, diplomats, high-level representatives of different religious groups and Turkish citizens. Bahçeşehir and Galatasaray universities hosted other public events as well. Since 2012 documentaries such as “Shoah” by Claude Salzman and other educational broadcasting on the Holocaust are aired on state television during the week of January 27⁴².

While Holocaust remembrance activities have gained momentum, Holocaust education is still not a part of the curriculum. In 2012, Turkey established a working group in Ankara composed of representatives from the Ministry of National Education and the Higher Education Council to discuss Holocaust education in Turkey. This working group participated in a conference on Holocaust education in Jerusalem organized by Yad Vashem. The Ministry of National Education committed to accelerate its efforts in adding a more detailed “Holocaust education” perspective to the national curricula of schools and to the training program of teachers.

In 2013, the Holocaust Memorial Museum of the United States, the Social Change Association and the Anne Frank House co-organized an educational workshop geared towards high school teachers. Thirty participants were selected from an applicant pool of 300. These participants then attended weekend long workshop sessions taught by international experts.⁴³ This workshop was one of the groundbreaking efforts that introduced Holocaust education in Turkey.

⁴² ‘Awareness on Holocaust and Anti-Semitism in Turkey: A Report by Turkey’, November 2015, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey

⁴³ <http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/turkiyede-bir-ilk-holokost-egitimi-basladi-1165750/>

Despite these efforts, Holocaust education remains an underexplored area in K-12 and higher education. In the aim to follow suit with other nations that take part in Holocaust education and remembrance events, Turkey should press for this subject to be included in the school curriculum. Movies, documentaries and visual archives should be used as in-class educational material to create awareness. For instance, the University of Southern California Shoah Foundation digitalized archives could be utilized in higher education institutions that teach in English. These archives could also be translated into Turkish to expand reach and audience. School curriculum should not only focus on chronological history but more importantly the social, legal and political ramifications of the Holocaust. A Holocaust education website covering teaching material in Turkish can be created teaming up with the number of Holocaust education centres based in Israel, United States, Canada, United Kingdom and other European countries. These efforts could be supported by K-12 competitions that encompass oral history and arts.

In addition, the year preceding and during the Holocaust represents a mass wave of immigration from Europe to the Americas and elsewhere. Although the circumstances are quite different, the refugee crisis taking place vis-à-vis Syria is a reminder of the severe conditions that refugees endure. Turkey's unique position in the Syrian refugee crisis can also serve as a bridge in communicating the Jewish refugee experience to Turkish society.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This report challenges the pre-judgement of an inborn hostility of Turkish society towards Israel. Recognizing the need to pinpoint the problems that lie at the heart of Turkish-Israeli relations, this report offers a diagnosis for the issues between two countries and provides an overview of how these issues are perceived by young generations in Turkey; which will in turn provide a basis for more effective people-to-people programs fostering dialogue.

There is a premise that Turkish-Israeli relations are profoundly unnatural and paradoxical, often times presented within the security-oriented perspective. To be sure, security-oriented perspectives prevailed and shaped bilateral relations. However, while bilateral political relations have become strained in the past decade, trade volume has increased significantly. This growing trend suggests a new framework for interpreting Turkish-Israeli relations. Along these lines, this study was conducted with the intention of shedding light on the recent shifts in Turkish-Israeli relations based on the perceptions of Turkish youth and to provide a set of recommendations derived from the research.

The findings of this study are limited to the survey participants. However, given that each participant was selected from a specific political surrounding, the research team believes that the sample reflects the overall leanings of average Turkish youth. The findings of the report indicate that there is notable interest in Israel and the Jewish identity amongst Turkish youth. This interest, if actualized, can certainly open up new channels of communication and understanding. However, lingering curiosity about Israel and Judaism coupled with the fear-mongering rhetoric and religious education can also feed stereotypes and prejudices. More importantly, the respondents overwhelmingly acknowledge that they don't have enough information on Israel and Judaism. Therefore, the Turkish-Jewish community, Turkish and Israeli state actors and non-state institutions should collaborate in deconstructing the existing myths. One way of doing this is through supporting educational, touristic and professional exchanges that will provide the opportunity to meet with locals and experience the culture.

This study indicates that there is currently a more balanced and healthy interpretation of Israel gaining traction amongst Turkish youth. This interpretation rests on distinguishing Israel's policies towards Palestinians and Israel as a key regional actor and trade partner. Despite the political crises that shaped the past decade, the democratization and de-securitization of Turkey has inevitably led to a more neutral interpretation of Israel where the youth values the importance of rational policies over emotional reactions. Further exploration of trade and economic cooperation are perhaps two of the most significant findings of this research suggested by the respondents. Trade relations and improving economic ties can certainly foster better bilateral relations but it doesn't necessarily yield positive societal dynamics. More importantly, the affects of the current re-securitization of Turkey and fear-mongering rhetoric that stresses 'foreign plots' to dismember Turkey hinging on the Sevres

Syndrome are yet to be seen. For that reason, cultural initiatives that support mutual communication and dialogue should also compliment business development.

This study clearly indicates that there is room for improvement and development. At the same time, the research team recognizes the hate speech and anti-Semitic discourse that exists on social media outlets as well. The existence of such narratives that feeds on anxiety and stereotypes can limit interaction. Nevertheless, the recent initiatives taken by the Turkish government such as criminalizing hate speech and heritage conservation indicate a positive direction in dealing with issues of intolerance and rather embracing a more diverse background. The success will depend on the political will as well as responsible media coverage. Therefore, issues such as Holocaust education and remembrance should be incorporated into the curriculum, which can help eliminate the negative discourse in the long-run, open up new perspectives for understanding and demonstrate Turkey's good intentions towards Israel.