

Supporting Israel-Turkey Reconciliation

A second-track channel of Mitvim – The Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies and the Global Political Trends (GPoT) Center, in cooperation with the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

Turkey-Israel relations experienced several peaks and valleys in the last six decades, yet the dominant narrative between the two countries emphasized their shared strategic interests in the Middle East. This narrative reached its apex in the 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the signing of the Oslo Accords by Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization in 1993. However Turkey-Israel relations experienced a severe deterioration following the collapse of the peace process. New elites in both countries lacked familiarity with the perspectives of the other, and a series of debacles, including the flotilla incident in 2010, demonstrated that the narrative once shared by Turkey and Israel was no longer viable.

Both states have labored to repair their diplomatic ties. And even when rapprochement is reached, it may be some time before the grievances are forgotten. New narratives that can serve to support the development of cooperative Israel-Turkey relations in the future must be forged.

In the hopes of positively impacting the state of relations between their governments, [Mitvim - The Israeli Institute of Regional Foreign Policies](#) and the [Global Political Trends \(GPoT\) Center](#) formally signed in 2012 a cooperation agreement, and launched a second-track channel that supports efforts to mend Israel-Turkey ties and enables experts, diplomats and journalists from both countries to exchange views on the dramatic changes taking place in the Middle East.

The cooperation between Mitvim and GPoT includes a series of policy dialogues, hosted both in Istanbul and Tel Aviv and in cooperation with the [Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung](#). These dialogues have proven to develop and maintain a vital artery of communication during a period of reduced diplomatic ties. They are also regularly covered by the Israeli and Turkish media.

In September 2012, GPoT hosted [the 1st Round](#) of the policy dialogue, which enabled experts from both countries to analyze the Arab Spring, the Syrian civil war, and prospects for mending Turkey-Israel relations. Prior to the event Mitvim initiated a public opinion poll on Israeli-Turkish relations. The results, aired on Israel's TV Channel 2 News, showed that a majority of Israelis favored issuing an apology to Turkey regarding the flotilla incident, as part of a broader agreement between the countries.

[The 2nd Mitvim-GPoT policy dialogue](#) (October 2013), entitled "Comparing Conflicts, Seeking Resolutions", took place in Israel. The policy dialogue included a workshop on

Israel-Turkey bilateral relations and conflict resolution efforts, and meetings with the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Policy Adviser to President Shimon Peres, and MK Isaac Herzog, Chairman of the Labor Party.

Two additional rounds of talks were held in 2014. [The 3rd Round](#) took place in Istanbul (May 2014), at a time when Israel and Turkey were close to signing a reconciliation agreement. The talks during this round focused on policy recommendations that could assist the future reconciliation process.

Also in May 2014, and as a consequence of the policy dialogues, Mitvim hosted former Turkish Foreign Minister, H.E. Yaşar Yakış, for a [series of policy meetings and events](#) in Israel. It was a rare visit by a senior Turkish public figure to Israel. During his stay in Israel, Mr. Yakış spoke at the Knesset, in a joint event with the Knesset Caucus for Regional Cooperation, and gave a public talk at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

[The 4th Round](#) took place in Istanbul (November 2014). It focused on the impact of the summer's war in Gaza upon Israel-Turkey ties, and on emerging geo-political challenges in the broader Middle East.

In March 2015, representatives from Mitvim and GPoT met in Washington DC for the [5th Round](#) of meetings, which included two events, one organized in cooperation with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and another with the [Brookings Institution](#). Experts from Mitvim, GPoT, and leading American think tanks discussed Israel-Turkey relations, in a regional and international context, as well as the US's historical role in fostering ties between Israel and Turkey, and its efforts to mediate reconciliation since 2010.

The [6th Round](#) took place in Israel in October 2015, under the theme "New Governments, New Realities". It explored chances for reconciliation following the elections in both Israel and Turkey, and the Russian involvement in Syria. This round included [meetings at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Knesset](#). Toward it, the Mitvim Institute carried out [public opinion research](#) to assess Israeli perceptions toward the mending of Israel-Turkey relations.

In January 2016, following progress in Israel-Turkey negotiations, Mitvim and GPoT Center published [a joint op-ed](#) in the Israeli and Turkish media calling on the leadership of both countries to seal the Israel-Turkey deal: "Turkey and Israel are on the verge of opening a new chapter in their relationship that will potentially contribute to peace, safety, and prosperity in both countries and within the region ... We, leaders of Israeli and Turkish think tanks that have been working together since 2012 to support the mending of Israel-Turkey relations, welcome this development and call on the leaders of both countries to seize this opportunity."

In June 2016, just as the Israeli-Turkey negotiations were about to conclude, Mitvim and GPoT Center experts met in Istanbul for [round 7 of their policy dialogue](#). Their discussions focused on producing recommendations for a successful reconciliation process, and on mapping possible implications of an Israel-Turkey agreement on regional dynamics, Gaza, and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. This round included [public statements](#) and a unique joint appearance by Member of Knesset Ksenia Svetlova, and Dr. Mesut Özcan from the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.