

Turkey's Former Foreign Minister, H.E. Yaşar Yakış, Visited Israel to Promote Israel-Turkey Reconciliation

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Turkey's former Foreign Minister, [H.E. Yaşar Yakış](#), visited Israel on 20-21 May 2014, upon the invitation of [Mitvim - The Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies](#).

The visit was carried out in light of progress made **towards Israel-Turkey reconciliation**. It was aimed at preparing for the day after an agreement is signed between the two countries. Yakış's visit included a series of events and meetings with prominent politicians and diplomats, which focused on bi-lateral issues, the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, and regional affairs.

On 20 May 2014, H.E. Yakış spoke at a **special event at the Israeli Parliament** (Knesset), organized by the Mitvim Institute and the Knesset Lobby for Regional Cooperation headed by [MK Nitzan Horowitz](#) (*Meretz*). The event was attended by members of Knesset, diplomats, scholars, journalists, and businessmen.

The following day (21 May 2014), H.E. Yakış also gave a **public lecture at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem**, where he was hosted by the Nehemia Levtzion Center for Islamic Studies, the Forum of Turkish Studies, the European Forum, and the Mitvim Institute. His lecture dealt with Turkey's foreign policy and the future of Turkey-Israel relations.

During the visit, Israel's Channel 2 News broadcasted an [exclusive interview](#) with H.E. Yakış, conducted by Arad Nir, the channel's foreign news editor.

In his speech at the Knesset, H.E. Yakış highlighted the following points:

The **flotilla incident** could have been avoided. Both countries share the blame for not doing enough to prevent it. But now is the time to look forward.

I hope that Israel and Turkey will sign the **reconciliation deal** as soon as possible. There is no fundamental reason for Turkey not to be in **good terms with Israel**. We have **no conflicting interests**.

Turkey and Israel **do not have the luxury not to cooperate**. They need to jointly confront security challenges emanating from extremist groups in Syria, endangering both countries. We must cooperate to **contain the threat from Syria** before it is too late. Israel and Turkey are best positioned to do so.

The feeling that I have, both in Jerusalem and in Ankara, is that **things are moving forward** without any hindrance behind closed doors. Israel is still considered a **strategic ally** in the eyes of Turkish policy makers, even if some say otherwise due to domestic political considerations.

The **natural gas** issue is another incentive that brings the countries closer. The ball is in Israel's court. I do not think there will be any difficulties stemming from the Turkish side. The gas issue creates a mutual interest, and can also have a positive impact on efforts to resolve the **conflict in Cyprus**.

Turkey and Israel are now entering a very **sensitive diplomatic phase** in their relationship, which is akin to recovery from a protracted sickness. More attention is required during this period than was ever utilized during the good times and the bad. If we do something wrong now, it may spoil the entire process.

The **foundations of the Israel-Turkey relationship** are already in place. We do not need to start from the very beginning. However, there is a need for **civil society** on both sides to develop bankable initiatives to improve relations that politicians can use. **Inter-parliamentary cooperation** should also be developed.

Turkey welcomes **Palestinian reconciliation**, and hopes that this marks a new beginning for the Palestinians. Turkey favors Hamas and Fatah in the same manner, and does not favor one over the other.

Turkey can utilize its good ties with **Hamas** to try and persuade it to accept the Quartet conditions, which Turkey also endorses. Already in 2006, Turkey tried to convince Hamas to forgo its armed struggle against Israel. Unfortunately, they did not take our advice. **Will Hamas take Turkey's advice now? It may.**

Hamas has realized the limits of its own power and may listen to us more carefully. Israel should regard Hamas-Fatah reconciliation as an **opportunity to reach peace** with all Palestinians, and not only with the West Bank.

Prime Minister Erdoğan can feel the pulse of the Turkish nation much better than any other politician. Erdoğan himself says he is **not an anti-Semite** at all. He has demonstrated this on several occasions in his **contacts with the Jewish community** in Turkey.

I do not think that Prime Minister Netanyahu can get **guarantees** that Prime Minister Erdoğan will not bash him or Israel again. You cannot sign an agreement on this. It is a question of **mutual trust**, which must be restored.

MK Nitzan Horowitz (*Meretz*), Chairman of the Lobby for Regional Cooperation, said in his opening remarks that “Israel-Turkey relations are of utmost importance for the two countries. This event at the Knesset is a first step towards normalizing Israel-Turkey relations and is aimed at also promoting regional cooperation. The main obstacles on the way to the reconciliation agreement have already been overcome, and the agreement is now all set. I call upon the political leadership to sign the agreement, to put an end to this crisis, and to finally enable Israel-Turkey normalization. We have waited too long for this to happen, and too much damage has already been done.”

MK Reuven Rivlin (*Likud*) stated that “it is Israel and Turkey’s destiny to be neighbors. There are friendly relations between the peoples of the two countries. It is not only a matter of mutual interests, but also of mutual values. Israel and Turkey are the two democratic countries in the region. Turkey could help Israel end our tragedy of the last 150 years, by being a bridge between Palestinians and Israelis, between Arabs and Jews. We have not succeeded in solving this problem by ourselves, and perhaps Turkey could help. I have much hope for the future of Israel-Turkey relations.”

MK Erel Margalit (*Labor*) added that while the Israel-Turkey relationship has historically been associated with military and business ties, the future narrative should “let innovation facilitate relations” and allow Israeli and Turkish tech initiatives and entrepreneurs create a new means of dialogue and cooperation.

Dr. Nimrod Goren, Chairman of the Mitvim Institute, stated in his closing remarks that “a new chapter in Israel-Turkey relations is about to begin. In order to help it become a successful one, the two countries should restore mutual trust, engage in constructive marketing of the reconciliation agreement, set in place diverse official channels between them, take economic cooperation to the next level, establish joint platforms for analysis and coordination regarding regional affairs, increase ties between civil societies, and engage in mutual conflict resolution support - including in the Cyprus conflict and in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Mitvim Institute has been working towards these goals over the past three years, together with its Turkish partners at the [Global Political Trends \(GPoT\) Center](#).”



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