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CENTER for DIPLOMATIC AFFAIRS and POLITICAL STUDIES

THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN POLICY OF ISRAEL AND THE IMPACTS OF THE NORMALIZATION PROCESS ON ISRAEL'S FOREIGN POLICY

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[Panel Notes](#)

On 8.10.2020 at 5 pm "Eastern Mediterranean Policy of Israel and The Impacts of The Normalization Process on Israel" panel held online by DIPAM. Panel moderated by Researcher Selim Han YENİACUN from Shanghai University Global Governance Center, Jason EPSTEIN from Southfive Strategies LLC, Prof. Dr. Ahmet Kasim HAN from Altınbaş University, Researcher-Author Sigurd NEUBAUER, and Dr. Ceyhun ÇİÇEKÇİ from Bandırma Onyedi Eylül University participated as speakers.

At the beginning of the panel moderator mentioned that there were participants from both Turkey and United States. Explaining the functioning and purpose of the panel, Moderator Yenicun stated that Israel is an important figure in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. He stated that the topics he will discuss with the speakers in the panel are Israel's new position in the region along with the normalization process and its new alliances, and Israel's foreign policies towards the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. The moderator, who asks questions to the speakers about the dimensions of the changes in the region, before Dr.Ceyhun ÇİÇEKÇİ give speech, Yenicun ask questions about general situation in the Eastern Mediterranean region, new trends in Israeli foreign policy, Turkey and Israel's current relationship.

At the beginning of his speech, Ceyhun ÇİÇEKÇİ tried to analyze Israel's Eastern Mediterranean policy from the 90s to the 2010s. The speaker, who tried to explain Israel's Eastern Mediterranean policy, especially in a comparative perspective with the 90s, said that the 90s and 2010s were similar periods for Israel. Çiçekçi, who wants to underline the main approach that guides Israel's foreign policy

towards the Eastern Mediterranean, continued his speech by saying "I can divide Israel's eastern Mediterranean policy into two". He stated that the first was a security-oriented approach and that Israel's foreign policy was in this direction. He then said, "This is also about the 90s and 2010s because with Israel exploring huge natural gas reserves since the early 2010s, it is moving in the same direction as Greece and Southern Cyprus." The speaker said that when we look at today, this partnership is much more than a natural gas or energy partnership. Then, he claim that Israel is in line with Greece and Southern Cyprus, especially in the Eastern Mediterranean; over against to Turkey. He said that today, Israel is in a balanced position against the Turkish presence in the region and that this approach is security-oriented. Second one is about energy diplomacy, the speaker stated that energy diplomacy is very important for Israel. He stated that energy diplomacy is also very important in terms of Israel's diplomatic efforts in the region and developing its relations with the EU. He stated that Israel aims to legitimize its position within the framework of EU policies on the basis of its alliance with the EU members Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration.

Çiçekçi mentioned that gas agreements with Egypt and Jordan strengthen Israel's relations with its neighboring countries. He stated that the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum was a lucrative organization for Israel's energy diplomacy. He underlined that Israel's participation in the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum is very important in terms of diplomatic recognition of Israel. Speaker underline that if Turkey and Israel can agree, transfer of Israel's natural gas to Europe via Turkey, this situation will be beneficial

for both sides. ÇİÇEKÇİ, towards the end of his speech, emphasized that Greece's membership to the EU and also to NATO is a facilitator for Israel's foreign policy approach, while it is a balancing factor against Turkish revisionism in the region. Starting his speech with the 2017 Gulf Crisis, Sigurd NEUBAUER evaluated the Qatar crisis and its aftermath. He explained that the Gulf Crisis broke out when the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Egypt blockade Qatar due to their alleged support for Hamas and terrorism. Especially in Turkey, Iran and Israel's policies during the crisis, he stated that prevents the conversion of fighting the crisis. Neubauer stated that Israel has strengthened its de facto strategic partnership with the United Arab Emirates since the Gulf Crisis and is moving towards Abraham Accord, an official peace agreement. Speaker also said that Israel took a peaceful attitude in this process by extending a peace hand to Doha (Qatar).

Stating that Israel strengthened its strategic partnership with the UAE during this crisis, the speaker said that with the normalization agreement, Israel wanted to maintain peace and stability in the Gulf region. NEUBAUER said that he agrees with the Former Foreign Minister of Bahrain, who said, "The Arab peace initiative was always a starting point for negotiations." He claimed that Israel supported diplomatic efforts to reduce tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean and the region along with the normalization process.

Jason Epstein continued to talk at the panel's first recalling that Turkey is the first Muslim country which recognize Israel, thanks to past Israeli-Palestinian cooperation and negotiations this two country had good relations. Before the

second Intifada Israel has no good relations with Greece, Greek Cypriot Administration and Egypt, in this period Turkey played a significant role in the region also at that time Israel has very tight economic ties with Turkey. He noted that it should be remembered that relations remained positive in many aspects during the first period of Erdogan prime ministry. The speaker stated that the Mavi Marmara tragedy was a turning point in terms of bilateral relations, and that the bilateral relations were seen to deteriorate after the events that caused Israel to enter Gaza in 2008 and subsequent events at the Davos summit. Epstein stated that during the Obama administration with the US signaling that it would no longer play a leadership role Israel was trying to find a new ally. The Obama administration is promoting reconciliation despite there is no improvement of relations with Turkey, he also stated that Israel even made visits to Moscow while in search of new ally. He stated that at the same time, Israel obliged to look as far away as Greece, Southern Cyprus and China. Later with the change of power in Egypt, this gap was filled to some extent.

Epstein stated that Israel's relationship with Greece is not a game change in economic matters, but Israel has a strategic opportunity and stated that it will benefit by establishing close ties with Southern Cyprus. Epstein said that another reason for these relations is that, as Sigurd Neubauer mentioned, Greece and Southern Cyprus are EU member states. Also Epstein, stated that today both Israel and Turkey's interest to ensure that a strong and independent Azerbaijan can stand against Iran.

Epstein note that Israel was trying to supply natural gas to other neighbors, such as the Palestinian territories, Egypt and Jordan. Commenting on the EastMed Natural Gas Pipeline Project, the speaker said: "It is absolutely uncertain whether a gas pipeline considered economically viable is economically viable even if you include all countries in the region." Only Israel, Greece, Egypt, Cyprus is not, if you include also Turkey, even though it was unclear consensus on these issues will be construction of pipelines "he added.

Epstein stated that Israel is willing to export its natural gas resources to countries but on the other side exclusion of Turkey from East Mediterranean Gas Forum as he thought it was a big mistake. Main point for him is two countries planning build of submarine pipeline between Turkey and Israel.

Ahmet Kasım HAN, who took over the speech at the panel, said that Eastern Mediterranean is one of the main areas where developing relations between Turkey and Israel. He also note that former and current Turkish experts willing to cooperate with Israel. Han stated that, "I can say I do not expect a change soon in Turkey-Israel relations, because I do not think it would bring a better environment to countries in the region in the near future of Palestinian issue. This does not mean that Israel cannot improve its relations with the Palestinian authority, in fact the agreements with the UAE and Bahrain have closures that could actually improve or help improve Israel's relations with the Palestinian authority, but I'm sure these developments will also be considered minor."

Han thinks that, Turkey will not change its stance on the Palestinian issue, and

believes Turkey's relations with Israel could improve based on Eastern Mediterranean. Speaker underlined that Turkey is excluded from East Mediterranean Gas Forum and emphasized that Turkey stand oppose to Greek and Cypriots claims over Eastern Mediterranean. He also think that Israel will not strongly support the Greek and Greek positions on the diplomatic front. A possible change of government in Israel, can be increased to at least one or two-stage Turkish-Israeli relations and said that it was important for the development of Israel-Turkey relations.

Moderator Yeniçun asked Ahmet Kasım Han whether Israel has an option to become a regional power independent of US foreign policy, emphasizing that Israel's relationship with China and this relationship is linked to the Eastern Mediterranean.

Ahmet Kasım Han, referring to the importance and power of China over the region, evaluated Israel's relations with China in general. He stated that these relations need diversity and that Israel's foreign policy has this diversity. Saying that the lowest point in US-Israel relations is the Obama period, Han said that he did not think that anything bad would happen to US-Israel relations, even if the government in the next year will not adapt to Israel as much as it is today.

Speaking about Israel's relationship with global powers, Ahmet Kasım Han said that Israel was very successful in reconciling with Russia, conveyed the continued support of the US to Israeli policies and evaluated the EU-Israeli relations and then emphasized that the EU would not take an anti-Israel stance.

As a result, in the panel where Israel's new position in the region and its energy policies were discussed; since the normalization process initiated by Israel created a new balance of power in the region, the economic and political gains that were or will be included in the normalization process, Israel's power and influence in the region increased with this process, from the relations of the global and regional powers with Israel, to creation of new partnerships via energy activities, there has also been cited as possible of lucrative opportunities for cooperation from both sides and between Turkey and Israel.



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ABOUT DISCUSSANTS

Dr. Ceyhun ÇİÇEKÇİ, is a lecturer at Bandırma Onyedi Eylül University. He completed his undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral studies in the profession of International Relations. At the international level, he has been a writer/consultant/speaker at think tanks such as The Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies (MDC), The Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies (MITVIM). At the national level, He has worked for many national think tanks and news agencies.

Jason EPSTEIN, is a consultant with more than a quarter-century of professional experience in government relations, media affairs, and cultural outreach. He founded Southfive Strategies, LLC in November 2002, a consultancy providing clients access to members of the executive branch, congressional leaders, important media organizations, business leaders, think tanks, and human rights organizations. Clients have included the Turkish Embassy in Washington, Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus' Washington office, Muslim World League in Mecca, Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy in Baku, Bahcesehir University in Istanbul, World Jewish Restitution Organization in Jerusalem, American Cinema Foundation in Los Angeles, and The Israel Project in Washington.

Prof. Dr. Ahmet Kasım HAN, received an undergraduate, graduate, doctorate, and post-doctoral degrees in economics, international relations, strategy, finance, and negotiation strategies at Istanbul, Boğaziçi, Koç, and Harvard Universities. He is a lecturer at Altınbaş University Faculty of Economics, Administrative and Social Sciences, Department of International Relations in Istanbul.

Selim Han YENİACUN, is a Ph.D. candidate at Shanghai University Global Studies Program. He graduated from the Department of Political Science and International Relations at Marmara University in 2013. He took his first MA degree from the same university's Middle Eastern and Islamic Countries Research Institute in 2016. He also obtains a second MA degree in Israel Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Yenicun's research interests are American missionary movements in the Middle East, China-Israeli Relations, China-Middle East Relations, Turkish Foreign Policy and Israeli Foreign Policy.

Sigurd NEUBAUER, is an internationally recognized authority on the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Persian Gulf Security, U.S.-Arab relations, Middle East politics, Arab-Israeli relations, Afghanistan, and U.S. defense industry. His expertise also includes NATO, Norwegian defense policy and transatlantic relations. He is the author of "the Gulf Region and Israel: Old Struggles, New Alliances".