

NEW REALITIES IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN: THE CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE OF EU-ISRAEL ECONOMIC RELATIONS

Annual EU Meeting of the Israeli European Policy Network (IEPN),
co-organized by the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed)

7 October 2021, Palau de Pedralbes, Barcelona

INTRODUCTION

Since 1975, the free trade agreements between Israel and the EU have generated intensive trade and economic relations. Following the entry into force of the Association Agreement in 2000, EU-Israel trade has increased dramatically to reach historical highs in the past years (amounting to approximately €36.2 billion in 2017). The EU is today Israel's main trading partner, accounting for one-third of its total trade.

However, in the meantime political relations have significantly worsened. Over the last decade, differences over the Middle East Peace Process, the intensification of Israel's settlement policy in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, as well as the recent outbreak of violence in May 2021, have led to growing tensions with the EU formally committed to the two-state solution and international law.

Despite the centrality of its economic ties with the EU, Israel has increasingly looked elsewhere both for economic outreach and political support. The diversification of its privileged relations has included individual European countries, including members of the Visegrád group, in an attempt to fragment the EU political positions regarding the Middle East Peace Process. In addition to the long-standing alliance with the US, Israel has also cemented ties with key Arab countries sealing several normalization deals with a number of them, including the United Arab Emirates and Morocco, increasing security and, above all, energy cooperation in the context of the Eastern Mediterranean.

In the short-term and in the context of the fast post-COVID reopening of its economy, these multiple alignments have proven tenable and useful to Israel's own national interest. However, in the medium-term several conundrums could expose the intrinsic frailty of these tactical shifts. How will the new coalition government position itself regarding Netanyahu's legacy in this domain?

In the framework of its annual EU meeting, the Israeli-European Policy Network (IEPN), in cooperation with the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed), will provide a suitable platform to analyse and debate the challenges of the EU-Israel economic relations, situating them in their overarching environment of the Eastern Mediterranean. The meeting will explore the extent to which Israel has increasingly diversified its economic strategies by fostering relations with Asian and Arab countries, as well as energy cooperation with neighbouring countries. The meeting will assess the impact of this strategy on EU-relations in the context of the Eastern Mediterranean sub-regional cooperation. Finally, the interlinked character of economic and political relations will be questioned, as well as the conditions and opportunities under which improved and sustainable relations can be built between Israel, its neighbours and the EU.

In cooperation with

NEW REALITIES IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN:
THE CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE
OF EU-ISRAEL ECONOMIC RELATIONS

PROGRAMME

Chatham House Rule Applies

THURSDAY, 7 OCTOBER 2021

Pedralbes Palace

09.15

Gathering and Registration

09.45

Opening Remarks

Senén Florensa, President of the Executive Committee, European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed)

Micky Drill, Project Manager, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung - Israel Office. IEPN Coordinator

Gerard Figueras, Secretary for Foreign Action, Government of Catalonia

Alberto Ucelay Urech, Director General for the Maghreb, the Mediterranean and the Middle East, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, Government of Spain

10.05

Session I. Beyond Europe: Diversification of Israel's economic relations

Chair

Roby Nathanson, Director General, Macro Center for Political Economics. IEPN Coordinator

Input statements from Israeli and EU perspectives

Patrycja Sasnal, Head of Research, The Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM)

Dan Catarivas, Executive Chairman, Israel-EU Chamber of Commerce Industry

First Reactions and Discussion

Nellie Munin, Associate Professor, Zefat Academic College

Emilio Cassinello, Director General, Toledo International Center for Peace (CITPax)

11.35

Coffee Break

NEW REALITIES IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN:
THE CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE
OF EU-ISRAEL ECONOMIC RELATIONS

12.00

Session II. EU-Israeli relations in the context of the Eastern Mediterranean energy cooperation

Chair

Micky Drill, Project Manager, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung - Israel Office. IEPN Coordinator

Input statements from Israeli and EU perspectives

Emilie Haya Moatti, Member of the Knesset, Israel Labour Parliamentary Group

Harry Tzimitras, Director, PRIO Cyprus Centre. Senior Fellow, Global Energy Center, Atlantic Council

First Reactions and Discussion

Michael Harari, Researcher, The Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies (MITVIM). Former Ambassador of Israel to Cyprus

Gonzalo Escribano, Senior Analyst, Elcano Royal Institute

13.30

Lunch Buffet

15.00

Session III. Political dialogue and economic cooperation: conditions and opportunities for improved and sustainable relations between Israel, the Eastern Mediterranean Region, and the EU

Chair

Roger Albinyana, Director of Mediterranean Regional Policies and Human Development, European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed)

Inputs statements from Israeli and EU perspectives

Yael Ravia-Zadok, Head of Economic Diplomacy Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Israel

Manuel Gómez-Acebo, Responsible for Mediterranean Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, Government of Spain. Former Ambassador of Spain to Israel

NEW REALITIES IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN:
THE CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE
OF EU-ISRAEL ECONOMIC RELATIONS

First Reactions and Discussion

Eduard Soler, Senior Research Fellow, Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB)

Alfred Tovias, Professor Emeritus, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

16.30

Conclusion of the conference and Closing

Felip Roca, Director of International Relations, Barcelona City Council

Senén Florensa, President of the Executive Committee, European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed)

Roby Nathanson, Director General, Macro Center for Political Economics. IEPN Coordinator