

# Promoting Liberal Democracy in the Eastern Mediterranean







# Table of Contents

<b>Preface – S. Daniel Abraham Center for Strategic Dialogue</b>	
Elie Friedman.....	2
<b>Preface – Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Israel</b>	
Judith Stelmach.....	3
<b>Joint Introduction</b> .....	4
<b>Challenges to Liberal Democracy in the Eastern Mediterranean</b>	
Marta Murzanska & George Chr. Pelagias.....	8
<b>Cypriot Liberal Democracy and its Challenges</b>	
Marta Murzanska & George Chr. Pelagias.....	18
<b>The Future of Democracies in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: A Greek Perspective</b>	
John M. Nomikos and A. Th. Symeonides.....	26
<b>Advancing Democracy in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: An Israeli Perspective</b>	
Ehud Eiran.....	38
<b>Joint Recommendations</b> .....	48
<b>About the Authors</b> .....	54

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# Preface – S. Daniel Abraham Center for Strategic Dialogue

Elie Friedman

In late 2017, we met with our partners at the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Israel office, Dr. Werner Purschra, director at the time, and Ms. Judith Stelmach, project manager. We engaged in a fruitful discussion about the importance of Israel's developing cooperation with Greece and Cyprus, and thought about how such cooperation could be beneficial to Israel's status vis-à-vis the European Union. We came to the conclusion that the three states have taken great strides to advance relations in the security and economic spheres, particularly in the field of energy, however, an element was missing from this developing partnership: the normative element. Through our discussions, we came to the understanding that Greece, Cyprus, and Israel are liberal democracies that face various internal and external challenges to their identity as such.

Israel, Cyprus, and Greece, from both a geographical and cultural perspective, have traditionally served as a kind of bridge between Europe and the Middle East. With various social, political, and economic upheavals across the Middle East over the past decade, the role of these countries, vis-à-vis European interests, has become all the more essential. Furthermore, the influence of autocratic dictatorships, or countries with non-democratic tendencies, has become emboldened in the East Mediterranean region. There are numerous ongoing inter- and intra-state conflicts, with many regional and world actors involved. The growing influence of authoritarian powers in the region is the result of a number of processes, including the lack of the rule of law, the gnawing away at democratic institutions and concepts, in favor of tribalism, corruption, clientalism, and clan-based affiliations. These trends, in addition to being prominent in authoritarian powers impacting the East Mediterranean, also threaten democracy and the rule of law in the democracies in the region – Greece, Cyprus, and Israel. In addition, in these countries, there is a need to promote judicial independence, respect for judicial decisions, good governance, procedurally fair decision-making processes, and ethics in both the public as well as private sectors.

We decided to engage in a trilateral research project whose purpose is to identify the ways in which the emerging

Greek-Israeli-Cypriote alliance can be expanded to include a normative element, which would complement the power-based considerations that drive it now. Specifically, our research project attempts to:

1. Develop the conceptual framework that can justify the need to add a normative layer to the alliance.
2. Identify possible avenues of trilateral cooperation – on the governmental level as well as that would advance liberal democracy in all three countries including issues such as: defending against radical political parties, strengthening checks and balances, dealing with the rise of non-democratic actors in the region, fighting corruption, and defending basic freedoms.

The project involves the cooperation of a number of researchers. The Cypriot perspective was studied by the Cypriot think tank European Rim Policy and Investment Council (ERPIC), represented by Mr. George Chr. Pelaghias, Executive Director and Ms. Marta Murzanska, Researcher and Assistant Project Coordinator, and Dr. Christodoulos G. Pelaghias, Chair. The Greek perspective was studied by the Research Institute for European and American Studies (RIEAS), represented by Dr. John Nomikos, Director and by A.Th. Symeonides, Academic Advisor. The Israeli perspective was studied by Dr. Ehud (Udi) Eiran, School of Political Science, University of Haifa. We thank each of the researchers for their ongoing cooperation and significant investment in this project.

We would like to express our deep thanks to the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Israel office, in particular to Ms. Judith Stelmach, project manager, who has been the most cooperative and intelligent partner one could hope for. In addition, we would like to thank former director, Dr. Werner Purschra, and new director, Dr. Paul Pasch for their initiative and ongoing cooperation and support.

We hope that this volume will create an impetus for ongoing cooperation both at the civil society and governmental level in the Eastern Mediterranean region.



# Preface – Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Israel

Judith Stelmach

Common economic and security interests shared by the State of Israel, the Republic of Cyprus, and the Hellenic Republic have contributed in recent years to the formation of a trilateral relationship among the three countries. The established collaboration between them covers a broad variety of issues: the development of offshore natural resources such as hydrocarbon and natural gas, environmental initiatives, research, communications, as well as the strengthening of across-the-board economic and trade relations.

The relationship also has a security component: The Eastern Mediterranean is – as the saying goes – a problematic neighborhood. Constant conflicts, terrorism, and wars as well as radical Islam coupled with weak to non-existent democratic structures in many countries in the region threaten Israel, Cyprus, and Greece, and make a strong argument for closer military cooperation between the three countries.

All these facts are known and have been broadly analyzed and discussed in the media as well as in scientific publications. However, it seems that beyond the obvious economic and security considerations there is another, not less important aspect of the trilateral relationship that has not received enough attention and consideration so far. The question we set out to answer in cooperation with our partners at the S. Daniel Abraham Center for Strategic Dialogue at Netanya Academic College and the excellent research team of Dr.

Ehud (Udi) Eiran (School of Political Science, University of Haifa, Israel), Dr. Christodoulos G. Pelagias, Mr. George Chr. Pelagias and Ms. Marta Murzanska (European Rim Policy and Investment Council, Cyprus) and Dr. John Nomikos and A.Th. Symeonides (Research Institute for European and American Studies, Greece) was how the trilateral cooperation can contribute to the promotion of liberal democratic values in the three countries as well as in the Eastern Mediterranean at large. We felt that this question has to be openly asked and put on the table along with all other considerations. In addition, according to our understanding, promoting liberal democracy cannot be just a byproduct of the Israeli-Cypriot-Greek collaboration, but must be one of its declared goals. We believe that keeping the common values of liberal democracy in mind and explicitly seeking to protect them will not only add a normative dimension to the relationship but will strengthen it and open possibilities for development and collaboration with the European Community as well as on a regional level.

In the name of FES Israel I would like to thank Dr. Ephraim Sneh, Dr. Yair Hirschfeld, Dr. Elie Friedman and Ms. Esti Ofer from the S. Daniel Abraham Center for Strategic Dialogue for the excellent and professional collaboration and the research team for its devotion and engagement. It is our hope that this publication – the fruit of several months of intensive team work – will serve as a basis for further discussion and action.





## Joint Introduction

The last decade has seen the emergence of a trilateral relationship between the State of Israel, the Republic of Cyprus, and the Hellenic Republic. This relationship has materialized out of joint economic interests, primarily connected to the development of offshore natural resources, and common security concerns in the form of religious radicalization, and the rise of regional hegemonic powers. In this joint introduction, we note the cooperation and growing relations between Israel, Cyprus and Greece, and suggests that such trilateral relationship will be strengthened if the liberal democratic values shared between the three are clearly articulated to form a normative dimension to the relationship.

### The Israeli-Cypriot-Greek Partnership

The trilateral partnership began to take form in 2010 with the discovery of significant hydrocarbon resources in Israel's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Natural gas discoveries in the Cypriot EEZ followed in 2011 and gave new incentives for Israel and Cyprus to develop their relations. Since then, many high-level meetings, connected to hydrocarbon exploration have been held. There are also plans for interconnecting the electrical power grids of Israel and Cyprus, a project that will eventually also include Greece.<sup>1</sup> The historical and cultural bond between Cyprus and Greece, made bringing the latter into the evolving relationship between Israel and Cyprus, a natural development. As a result, the three states have during the last eight years come to establish closer relations in multiple areas of common interests, such as environmental quality, scientific research, communications, and strengthening of across-the-board economic and trade relations. As of May 2018, the leaders of Israel, Cyprus, and Greece have held four trilateral summit meetings in an effort to strengthen their cooperation.<sup>2</sup> The three states have also established closer

military cooperation by entering into agreements, in 2015 and 2016, that set the legal framework for joint exercises. Several meetings between military officials have also taken place.<sup>3</sup>

Security concerns are a common denominator between the three states. Issues such as terrorism, the spread of radical Islam, corruption, and a shared realization over the threat of an increasingly hegemonic and revisionist Turkey under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, have fueled the ambitions of closer cooperation. In addition to Turkey's continued occupation of the northern part of Cyprus, its violation of Greek sovereignty, and growing anti-Israeli rhetoric, the Erdoğan government, with increased army and naval spending, is set to establish its dominance in the Eastern Mediterranean at the expense of its neighbors.

### Why Should the Trilateral Partnership Include a Normative Dimension?

The Israeli-Cypriot-Greek partnership has strong geostrategic foundations. Yet, civil society analysts as well as senior government personnel suggest that the relationship could be further expanded. In March 2018, Dr. Eran Lerman suggested in a paper titled A Strategic Vision for the Eastern Mediterranean<sup>4</sup> that the tripartite partnership should be expanded to become a broader 3+3 framework. The framework – modeled on the

1 Menelaos Hadjicostis, "Cyprus, Israel, Greece push for gas pipeline to Europe", *ABCNews* 8 May 2018, accessed May 13, 2018. See: <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/cyprus-israel-greece-push-east-med-gas-pipeline-55011677> (accessed May 13, 2018); Euroasia Interconnector LTD, "A Trans-European Energy Infrastructure Project: the Euro-Asia Interconnector Project", April 2017, see: <http://www.euroasia-interconnector.com> (accessed May 26, 2018)

2 Press and Information Office, "The 4th Cyprus-Greece-Israel Tripartite Summit Took Place in Nicosia," Press Release, Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Cyprus, 8 May 2018, see: <https://www.pio.gov.cy/en/press-releases-article.html?id=1668#flat> (accessed May 12, 2018); Eran Lerman, "The Fourth Trilateral Eastern Mediterranean Summit: Greece, Cyprus and Israel Consolidate their Cooperation", The Jerusalem Institute for Strategic Studies, Policy Paper, 15 May 2018, see: <https://jiss.org.il/en/lerman-the-fourth-trilateral-eastern-mediterranean-summit/> (accessed May 27, 2018)

Arye Mekel, "A New Geopolitical Bloc is born: Israel, Greece and Cyprus", *The Jerusalem Post*, 12 February 2016, See: <https://www.jpost.com/Opinion/A-new-geopolitical-bloc-is-born-Israel-Greece-and-Cyprus-445645>, (Accessed May 12, 2018); Press and Information Office, "Cyprus-Greece-Israel 4th Trilateral Summit Declaration," 8 May 2018, see: <https://www.pio.gov.cy/en/press-releases-article.html?id=1656#flat> (accessed May 13, 2018)

3 State of Israel, The Law Implementing the Accord between the Government of the State of Israel and the Government of the Republic of Cyprus Regarding the Status of their Troops – 2017; State of Israel, The Law Implementing the Accord between the Government of the State of Israel and the Government of the Greek Republic Regarding the Status of their Troops – 2017; see: [https://www.nevo.co.il/law\\_word/Law14/law-2671.pdf](https://www.nevo.co.il/law_word/Law14/law-2671.pdf) (accessed June 16, 2018); Amir Buhbut, "In a Foreign Land, at an Altitude of 2000 Meters: a Rare Glimpse into the Operations of the Commando Brigade", *Walla*, 15 June, 2017, see: <https://news.walla.co.il/item/3073563> (accessed May 26, 2018); CNA News Service, "Cyprus and Israel Hold Joint Military Exercises", 3 December 2017, see: <https://cyprus-mail.com/2017/12/03/cyprus-israel-hold-joint-military-exercises/> (accessed May 26, 2018); Gabi Siboni, Gal Perl-Fink, "The IDF's Exercises in Crete and Cyprus," The Institute for National Security Studies, Insight No. 945, 28 June 2017, see: [https://www.google.com/url?q=http://www.inss.org.il/publication/idf-exercises-cyprus-crete/&sa=U&ved=0ahUKEwic986NoaTbAhUMKp\\_oKHZf8D3IQFggFMAA&client=internal-uds-cse&cx=01346996972949419998:3tnipoarj5i&usq=AOvVaw35v5TlxmL1KUJafriFX\\_IAY](https://www.google.com/url?q=http://www.inss.org.il/publication/idf-exercises-cyprus-crete/&sa=U&ved=0ahUKEwic986NoaTbAhUMKp_oKHZf8D3IQFggFMAA&client=internal-uds-cse&cx=01346996972949419998:3tnipoarj5i&usq=AOvVaw35v5TlxmL1KUJafriFX_IAY) (accessed May 26, 2018); Israel Defense Force, "Security Challenges and Possible Future Cooperation: A meeting on the Joint Chief of Staff Level between the Israel Defense Force, the Greek Military and the Cypriote Military", 9 May 2018, see: <https://bit.ly/2PFpzFm>

4 Eran Lerman, "A Strategic Vision for the Eastern Mediterranean", *Jerusalem Institute for Strategic Studies: Scholarship*, 6 March 2018, See: <https://jiss.org.il/en/lerman-strategic-vision-eastern-mediterranean/> (accessed May 27, 2018)



Western Mediterranean Forum<sup>5</sup> - will be expanded to include Jordan and Egypt, as well as Italy. The tripartite framework will further the peace accords with Jordan and Egypt, and also help Israel become part of the region, highlighting the Mediterranean aspects of its identity. The desire to expand the partnership is also evident in the stated preferences of the leaders of three nations. The May 8, 2018, joint statement of the three leaders stressed their desire to identify new avenues for cooperation. The leaders stated, "In the meantime, much potential remains untapped and it is therefore imperative to focus our attention on and guide our resources to these areas in an effort to maximize the return from our cooperation, to our joint benefit."<sup>6</sup>

Over the years, the leaders of the three countries have alluded to the possibility of their joint democratic system of government as an element that supports the alliance. In a 2016 meeting with the Greek Prime Minister, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu welcomed his guest by stating, "The Middle East's only democracy is proud to welcome the prime minister of the world's first democracy."<sup>7</sup> Framing their joint challenges as stemming from their democratic system of the government, Prime Minister Netanyahu further stated, "We are two Eastern Mediterranean democracies that want to bring progress, security and peace to our peoples. But we live in a region that is increasingly volatile and unstable, and plagued by the forces of Islamist extremism. I believe that we are much stronger when we meet these challenges together."<sup>8</sup> The following year, Israel's Minister of Defense, Avigdor Liberman made similar remarks when he stated in a tri-partite meeting with his Cypriot and Greek colleagues that "Greece, Cyprus, and Israel share common values as democratic countries and face similar security challenges. The cooperation is intensifying every day on many levels, based on the understanding that we must take our fate into our own hands."<sup>9</sup>

The first argument in favor of advancing a liberal-democratic agenda into the partnership is that the three partners – Israel, Cyprus and Greece – are looking to expand their relationship into new spheres, and that they have already identified democracy as a clear common thread. Highlighting the commitment to their democratic values and institutions will offer an "ideological" cement to the alliance, that would support, and indeed advance, a partnership that is driven, for now, mostly on power-based calculations. It would also allow for ameliorating a possible critique against the partnership that it is a European effort to confront the East. Rather, it will not be presented as one driven by competing systems of government.

A second argument in favor of adding a liberal-democratic normative layer to the partnership is that it will allow each nation to support the other when dealing with internal challenges. All three countries, for example, have faced challenges of corruption, some of them rather similar. For example, both Greek and Israeli officials were investigated for being bribed by the same German firm, Siemens AG.<sup>10</sup> All three countries have a vested interest to fight corruption, and they could assist each other in doing so. Greece and Israel both face challenges of extreme right-wing parties with limited commitments to democracy. They could learn from each other how to contain these challenges and develop joint strategies.

Finally, all three states face external challenges to liberal democracy: Political Islam, as well as new and old regional actors such as Russia and China, have no commitment to liberal democracy. As suggested by the Israeli Prime Minister, the region at large, aside from Tunisia, includes mostly countries that are rather low on the democracy index. With this external reality affecting all three countries, they will benefit from developing joint strategies to handle a broad spectrum of regional challenges.

## Global Challenges for Liberal Democracy

Adding a democratic element into the trilateral quasi-alliance is in part, an effort to protect against an international environment that is turning less supportive of democracy. The retreat of liberal-democracy is well documented. The Economist Intelligence Unit's (EIU) global democracy Index demonstrates that democracy declined significantly over the last years on a global scale. The index follows sixty indicators organized in five categories resulting in an individual score for each country. The 2017 report starts by reporting that: "In the 2017 Democracy Index the average global score fell from 5.52 in 2016 to 5.48 (on a scale of 0 to 10): Although the decline does not seem significant, a broader view signals the severity

5 The forum includes Algeria, France, Italy, Libya, Malta, Mauritania, Morocco, Portugal, Spain and Tunisia. It was created in 2012 as a framework for dialogue and economic cooperation, based on the 1990s 5+5 framework between these countries, see: Western Mediterranean Forum, "The Forum", <http://westmediterraneanforum.org/the-forum/>, (accessed May 27, 2018).

6 Thema Newsroom, "The Declaration of the 4th Cyprus-Greece-Israel Trilateral Summit (Full text)", *The MAnews.com*, 8 May 2018, see: <http://en.protothema.gr/the-declaration-of-the-4th-cyprus-greece-israel-trilateral-summit-full-text/>, (accessed June 16, 2018).

7 Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Israel and Greece to Hold Government to Government Consultations", 21 January 2016, <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/PressRoom/2016/Pages/Israel-and-Greece-hold-Government-to-Government-consultations-27-Jan-2016.aspx> (accessed June 17, 2018)

8 Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Israel and Greece to Hold Government to Government consultations", 21 January 2016, <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/PressRoom/2016/Pages/Israel-and-Greece-hold-Government-to-Government-consultations-27-Jan-2016.aspx> (accessed June 17, 2018)

9 Neville Teller, "Greece, Cyprus and Israel – Champions of the Eastern Mediterranean", *The Jerusalem Post*, 13 December 2017, see: <https://www.jpost.com/Blogs/A-Mid-East-Journal/Greece-Cyprus-and-Israel-champions-of-the-eastern-Mediterranean-517891> (accessed 17 June, 2018).

10 Jörg Schmitt, "How German Companies Bribed Their Way to Greek Deals", Spiegel Online, 11 May 2010, see: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/complicit-in-corruption-how-german-companies-bribed-their-way-to-greek-deals-a-693973.html> (accessed 17 June 2018); Tomer Ganon and Lior Gutman, "Siemens Israel to Pay \$17 Million in Bribery Please Deal", *Calcalist*, 6 November 2017, <https://www.calcalistech.com/ctech/articles/0,7340,L-3724399,00.html> (accessed June 17, 2018)



of the situation. Some 89 countries experienced a decline in their total score compared with 2016, more than three times as many as the countries that recorded an improvement (27).<sup>11</sup> The report further shows that six out of seven global regions experienced a decline in democratic performance. One region – Canada and North America – remained stagnant according to this data. Freedom House's Freedom in the World 2018 report records similar trends. Freedom House's analysis begins with the suggestion that: "Democracy is in crisis. The values it embodies—particularly the right to choose leaders in free and fair elections, freedom of the press, and the rule of law—are under assault and in retreat globally." The report shows a 12-year decline in democracy on a global scale which is manifested as shaped by a number of developments including a growing influence of non-democratic powers, notably China and Russia, a decile in democratic norms in the United States, the rise of populism, threats to global security by corrupt and repressive regimes, and loss of belief in the democratic project among young people. This decline conforms to the suggestion by Levitsky and Ziblatt, which claims that although our popular image is of democracies that die a swift death, at the "hands of men with guns", the reality is "more often, though, democracies erode slowly, in barely visible steps". Small states such as Israel, Cyprus and Greece are heavily affected by the global environment, the distribution of power within it, and the norms that govern it. Therefore, a decline in global democracy created a challenge for democracy in all three nations.

### Liberal Democracy as a Common Denominator

Democracy is commonly defined as the rule of the people through representatives elected in free, fair and frequent elections.<sup>11</sup> However, the right to political participation alone does not guarantee a good and just government. Electoral processes do not necessarily ensure implementation of liberal principles. Finally, governments formed through elections can in fact be corrupt, inefficient, authoritarian and despotic, leading to the emergence of what has been dubbed "illiberal democracy".<sup>12</sup>

Liberal democracy should therefore be understood as a regime that incorporates and gives full expression to the values and principles that were the result of the Enlightenment and its humanistic philosophy. What is commonly referred to as "democracy" in the West is in fact "liberal democracy", which in addition to free and fair elections includes principles such as separation of powers, the rule of law, equality before the law, and protection of personal freedoms including freedom of speech, freedom of thought, and especially relevant to the Eastern Mediterranean, freedom of religion. These principles

11 John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government* (The Floating Press, 2009, first published in 1861) 161.

12 Fareed Zakaria, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy," *Foreign Affairs* (November/December 1997), see: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/1997-11-01/rise-illiberal-democracy>

are indispensable for the prevention of abuse of authority by those in power that might ultimately lead to tyranny.<sup>13</sup>

For Israel, Cyprus and Greece such values define a common culture, civilization, and way of life. It is such values, and such way of life, that the entire exercise of national defence is called upon to protect. It is the ability to maintain such values, civilization and way of life that defines the concept of national freedom.<sup>14</sup>

With thousands of years of common history, the people that inhabit the littoral regions of the Aegean, and the Eastern Mediterranean developed a shared culture that is distinct and recognizable. The impact of the two World Wars on the region opened the way for modernity and the introduction of democratic principles and liberal values. The Cold War, however, added momentum to existing conflicts, and distorted liberal values in favour of a transactional pragmatic support of friendly regimes irrespective of democratic credentials.<sup>15</sup>

The 21st Century has come to resemble what has been controversially identified as a civilizational conflict, this time between Political Islam, or Islamism, on one side, and liberal values on the other.<sup>16</sup> This competing political ideology that threatens to prevail throughout the region employs coercion in various forms, including outright violence to subjugate, and then eliminate religious, and/or ethnic opposition. Consequently, fundamental human rights are justifiably discarded in what has been defined as "Islamic Peace."<sup>17</sup> In fact, under the banner of Islamism, there can be no compromise or accommodation even for Muslims of different philosophical sects. Least of all is there tolerance of other religions or ideologies. Moreover, such theocratic authoritarianism often mimics the democratic processes to placate the West. The essential challenge, however, is religious fundamentalism with a social programme. Such "theocratic socialism" is not a new

13 Alexis de Tocqueville, "Of the Omnipotence of the Majority in the United States and Its Effects," in *Democracy in America: Historical-Critical Edition of De la démocratie en Amérique*, ed. Eduardo Nolla, vol. 2, translated from the French by James T. Schleifer. A Bilingual French-English editions, (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2010; first published in 1840), part 2, see: [http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/tocqueville-democracy-in-america-historical-critical-edition-vol-2#lf1532-02\\_label\\_607](http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/tocqueville-democracy-in-america-historical-critical-edition-vol-2#lf1532-02_label_607)

14 Condoleezza Rice, "Campaign 2000: Promoting the National Interest," *Foreign Affairs* (January/February 2000), see: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2000-01-01/campaign-2000-promoting-national-interest>

15 Philipp Casula and Mark N. Katz, "The Middle East", *Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy*, ed. Andrei P. Tsygankov (Routledge, 2018).

16 Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72, 3 (Summer 1993): 22-49. For a debate with Huntington's thesis, see *Foreign Affairs*, *The Clash of Civilizations: The Debate*, 1st edition (January 1996); Edward W. Said, "The Clash of Ignorance", *The Nation*, 4 October 2001. Bassam Tibi adds an ideological dimension to the debate, differentiating between Islam as a religion, and political Islam, or Islamism, as a religionized, political ideology. According to Tibi it is the latter, not the former, that is in conflict with liberal democratic values, see: Bassam Tibi, *Islamism and Islam* (Yale University Press, 2012) 94-98.

17 Bassam Tibi, "War and Peace in Islam", *Islamic Political Ethics: Civil Society, Pluralism, and Conflict*, eds. Sohail H. Hashmi and Jack Miles (Princeton University Press, 2009) 175-180.





concept, but is in fact one of other religious traditions.<sup>18</sup> What is relevant to this discussion, however, is that in the Eastern Mediterranean region theocratic socialism has stepped up to perform a role, and fulfil a need, that the Western democratic model has failed to deliver.

It is thus apparent that Cyprus, Israel and Greece are effectively surrounded in a region that is busy convincing itself of its

<sup>18</sup> Georgia Harkness, *Christian Ethics* (Abingdon Press, 1957), see: <https://www.religion-online.org/book-chapter/chapter-4-ethical-perspectives-of-the-early-church/>

Richard H. Hiers, "Biblical Social Welfare Legislation: Protected Classes and Provisions for Persons in Need," *Journal of Law and Religion* 17, 1/2 (2002): 49-96, see: [https://www.jstor.org/stable/1051395?read-now=1&refreqid=excelsior%3A5939d3b2c58885c992185a50f378f9bd&seq=11#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/1051395?read-now=1&refreqid=excelsior%3A5939d3b2c58885c992185a50f378f9bd&seq=11#page_scan_tab_contents)

opposition to all Western influence. Secular humanism is swept aside by the reinvention of a theocratic social and political ideology at the heart of which lies an irrefutable sense of supremacy and a fundamental intolerance. Even the Muslim moderate, branded as an apostate often faces a fate worse than that of the infidel. Under such circumstances any further erosion of U.S. resolve to uphold its special relationship with Israel, and the submission of European political will to the organized agendas of rising European Muslim populations, could signal a dark scenario for the region. It is, therefore, important that those who depend upon Western values to sustain their way of life in this region be prepared to preserve and defend such values through their own closer coalition.



# Challenges to Liberal Democracy in the Eastern Mediterranean

Marta Murzanska & George Chr. Pelaghias

In this chapter, we focus on the challenges to liberal democracy in the Eastern Mediterranean region, clarifying them as internal, or inherent to the concept of liberal democracy, and external, or contextual. The internal problems relate to the requisite balances between notions of majority vs. minority, sovereign vs. popular powers, individual vs. group rights, and the spirit of accommodation and compromise needed to reach and maintain such balances. The external challenges are twofold: the first stem from the position that secularism – that is government by man-made law – cannot lead to a righteous life; and the second, that in a secular context liberal democracy is not the only path to the good life, that is to say, a life of security, modernity, economic prosperity and even good governance.

The challenges facing liberal democracy in the Eastern Mediterranean are both internal and external. Internal challenges relate to issues of majority vs. minority, sovereign vs. popular power, individual vs. group rights, as well as the mechanisms required to accomplish and maintaining the requisite balances. The external challenges are twofold. The first stems from the conviction that secularism is not the path to a righteous life. The second asserts that liberal democracy is not the only model that leads to the good life, i.e. a life of security, modernity, economic prosperity, and even good governance.

Middle-Eastern countries are generally ranked low on various democracy/freedom indices. In 2017, for example, only two countries – Israel and Tunisia – were ranked as democracies (albeit as flawed ones) in the Economist Intelligence Unit's democracy index.<sup>1</sup> Even when expanding the focus to include Eastern Mediterranean countries, such as Turkey, Greece, and Cyprus, multiple challenges for democracy, are present: Turkey in moving further away from democracy and Greece is dealing with the rise of extremist parties as the traditional democratic institutions battle to provide answers to a struggling economy.

There are both structural and ideological reasons for the limits of democracy in the Middle East. Some countries in the region such as Morocco, the Gulf States, and Jordan are still ruled by rather autocratic monarchs. Though most of these nations have parliaments, they usually have limited political power. More modern regimes, such as Egypt, Syria and Iraq, under Saddam Hussein, applied advanced forms of socialism with a strong pan-Arab national position. The focus on redistributive policies and nationalism in societies with weak middle classes left little room for democracy to

evolve. Social and political instability, such as experienced in Syria in the late 1940s and during the 1950s, paved the way for the rise of authoritarian rulers such as Assad, Kaddafi and Saddam Hussein. Finally, the old-new religious ideology of political Islam further challenged democracy.

Great power involvement in the Middle East also curtailed the development of democracy. Between 1917 and the 1940s much of the region was ruled by European states whose democracy had progressed quite far domestically, but ruled their overseas dominions in the region in traditional colonial fashion. American regional involvement – again, despite its democratic values – is similarly perceived by many in the region as an anathema to democracy. The U.S., allied with non-democracies such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt, is suspected of having supported regime changes in Iran in 1953, and in Greece in 1967 that resulted in undermining democracy rather than promoting it. Other great powers interventions in the area – most notably the USSR (and later Russia), and more recently China – were never committed to democracy. Finally, the current global environment is not conducive to democracy.

In sum, therefore, liberal democracy must reconcile the tensions between individual freedom, and state sovereignty, majority rule, and minority rights, and address the essentially adverse relationship between individual, and group rights. That is to say the question whether human rights are both inalienable, and a birthright, or whether they are derived from ones ethnic, religious, racial or tribal affiliation. On a pragmatic level liberal democracy also faces a challenge as to its relation to prosperity and modernity. The suggestion being that illiberal democracy, and even authoritarianism (benign or otherwise) can form an alternative paradigm to the Western idea that liberalism, if not liberty, is an indispensable part of the modern prosperous state. This challenge is particularly important in the Eastern Mediterranean, because the illiberal paradigm has important sponsors, and because cultural, religious and historical factors create favorable conditions for its adoption.

<sup>1</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit, "The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index," see: <https://infographics.economist.com/2018/DemocracyIndex/> (accessed June 20, 2018)



## Liberal Democracy and Its Limits

A fundamental problem with the doctrine of liberal democracy is that its two main components – individualism and majoritarianism – in principle contradict each other. Liberal democracy pursues conflicting goals – the sovereignty of the state, the sovereignty of the people, and the protection of individual and minority rights. It is crucial, therefore, that a liberal democratic state guard against populist tendencies that disregard minority needs, and radical pluralism, or communalism, which may violate individual rights.<sup>2</sup>

Traditional Enlightenment thinkers suggest that in order to prevent abuse of authority, and tyrannical use of power, human liberty must be protected by guaranteeing freedom of thought, conscience, opinions and expression, freedom to independently define and pursue life goals according to one's tastes and character, and freedom of association.<sup>3</sup>

Increasingly, multiculturalism is used to reconcile majority rule, and minority rights, by allowing for group difference in the application of law, and group difference in political discourse.<sup>4</sup> The concept of multiculturalism, however, if carried to its logical limits, becomes incompatible with the notion of individual freedom and equality, as guaranteed by a set of civil and political rights to be enjoyed by all citizens without discrimination. Politics of special recognition, and cultural accommodation, through group-determined collective rights can easily become a prescription for discrimination. Moreover, the right to decide how to distribute group benefits opens the door to clientelism, and corruption. Setting objective, strictly applied, criteria for determining the beneficiaries of such special benefits is a very difficult task for most political cultures.

Supporters of multiculturalism argue that it is the liberal state that is obligated to recognize, accommodate, and protect cultural differences.<sup>5</sup> Others caution that the politicization of cultural group identities goes against the liberal ideal of universalism and equality of citizenship. Protecting, strengthening and perpetuating cultural differences may lead to deepening inequalities instead of guaranteeing

equality of opportunity to all citizens.<sup>6</sup> This is particularly relevant to minority groups that uphold illiberal values. There is a possibility, therefore, that illiberal group rights may lead to state-sanctioned discrimination, oppression or even persecution in the name of cultural preservation or religious freedom.<sup>7</sup> This “paradox of tolerance” appears where illiberal beliefs are tolerated in liberal democratic societies to the extent that they threaten the very concept of freedom.<sup>8</sup>

The threat of both majority and minority tyranny is important in the Eastern Mediterranean. In either case, democratic elections may bring to power illiberal forces that are not committed to safeguarding individual rights. Moreover, a peculiar form of multiculturalism based on the legacy of the Ottoman millet system, which served as a means of managing minority affairs in an ethnically and religiously diverse Ottoman Empire, has prevailed in the Eastern Mediterranean. It favors collective rights over individual rights to the detriment of equality, individual freedom and responsibility.

While some might claim that the *millet* was proof of Islamic tolerance of diversity,<sup>9</sup> others would disagree referring to Ottoman use of the *millet* system for enforced religious conversion, and ethnic annihilation.<sup>10</sup> The problem with the *millet* system's contemporary application is twofold.

2 Marc F. Plattner, “Populism, Pluralism and Liberal Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy* 21, 1 (January 2010): 84, 87.  
3 John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (Kitchener: Batoche Books, 2001) 15-16; de Tocqueville, “Of the Omnipotence.”  
4 Tariq Modood, *Multiculturalism. A Civic Idea* (Polity Press, 2013) 2; Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship. A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) 10-11, 27-32.  
5 Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, 83. Kymlicka defines “societal culture” as a culture “whose practices and institutions cover the full range of human activities, encompassing both public and private life”, and are typically associated with national groups. *Ibidem*, 75-76; Will Kymlicka, *Politics in the Vernacular. Nationalism, Multiculturalism, and Citizenship* (Oxford University Press, 2001) 42; Amy Gutmann, introduction, *Multiculturalism. Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) 5.

6 Brian Barry, *Culture and Equality. An Egalitarian Critique of Multiculturalism* (Polity Press, 2001) 5, 7, 115-116.  
Barry remarks that egalitarian liberalism, which he is a proponent of, does not exclude special measures and policies to be adopted in order to assist members of disadvantaged groups to eliminate obstacles in achieving equality of opportunity, as long as these disadvantages are not voluntarily chosen but result, for example, from disability, poverty, unemployment or unhealthy environment. However, he is opposed to special treatment of those groups, whose disadvantaged position in the society is a consequence of a choice, such as inability to do certain jobs due to the religious attire or to eat certain types of meat that are not religiously authorized. *Ibidem*, 114; Brian Barry, “Liberalism and Multiculturalism,” *Ethical Perspectives* 4,2 (1997): 4-6.  
7 The issue of accommodation of sharia law in the Western legal system can serve as an example. Academics, journalists, feminists and human rights activists, some of them from minority communities, have warned that legal pluralism applied as a form of group rights accommodation in the West can have serious consequences for vulnerable groups, such as women, children, or sexual minorities. See: Susan M. Okin, Joshua Cohen, Matthew Howard, and Martha C. Nussbaum, *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Elham Manea, *Women and Shari'a Law: The Impact of Legal Pluralism in the UK* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2016).  
8 Frank Cunningham, *Theories of Democracy. A Critical Introduction* (London, New York: Routledge, 2002) 39; Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies. Volume One: The Spell of Plato* (London: Routledge, 1947) 226.  
9 Tesneem Alkiek, “Tolerance, Minorities, and Ideological Perspectives,” *Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research*, 2018, see: <https://1pjhft3ggnei4el40qfi16ch-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/FINAL-Tolerance-Minorities-and-Ideological-Perspectives-pdf>  
10 Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London, New York: Verso) 366; Nesim Şeker, “Forced Population Movements in the Ottoman Empire and the Early Turkish Republic: An Attempt at Reassessment through Demographic Engineering,” *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 16 (2013), see: <https://journals.openedition.org/ejts/4396#ftn4>; George N. Shirinian, *Genocide in the Ottoman Empire: Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks, 1913-1923* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2017).



First, the *millet* legacy is one of the main reasons behind the general skepticism of minority politics in the region, where minorities are generally treated with a significant degree of suspicion and distrust, leading to their marginalization and social and legal discrimination, leading to reciprocal responses on their own part. In contemporary Muslim-majority countries, the Islamic tradition of *ahl al-dhimma* and the *millet* system leads to the prevailing notion that the state is owned exclusively by Muslims, while non-Muslims are merely tolerated, but do not belong to the society as a whole, hence their legal status is not equal to that of Muslim citizens.<sup>11</sup> This preconception creates a condition for the justification of “tyranny of the majority” on religious grounds and cannot be compared with the modern concept of multiculturalism which rests on the assumption that religious or ethnic groups in a state are all equal.

Second, the Ottoman *millet* system was based on communal rights – a euphemism in the case of non-Muslims, as opposed to individual rights. The legacy of *millet* is reflected in the legal systems of several countries in the region. The *millet* remnants are still embedded in the legal systems of several countries in the region formerly under the Ottoman rule, as reflected by the legal autonomy granted to groups in religious and family matters.

Further clouding the scene, is the issue of “minorities within minorities,” that is, when members of religious groups are discriminated in the name of religious rights that are granted collectively to such groups rather than their individual members. Where matters of personal status are governed by religious courts, discrimination of women and children with regard to marriage, divorce, custody and inheritance is more likely to occur.<sup>12</sup> While it might be argued that such legal pluralism allows for free practicing of one’s religion, hence fulfills a fundamental right of freedom of religion, religious monopoly on family laws defies the principle of equality before law as well as freedom of conscience since individuals in these countries are deprived of an option to regulate their personal status in a non-religious manner.

Without doubt, the cultural, ethnic and religious diversity of the Eastern Mediterranean requires effective protection. Such protection should not only include institutional safeguards, but also promotion of the concepts of diversity, tolerance, and inclusion. Such protection, however, must not be exercised at the expense of individual rights and freedoms of the citizen. Unequal treatment of individuals based on their

11 Will Kymlicka and Eva Pfölstl, introduction, *Multiculturalism and Minority Rights in the Arab World*, eds. Will Kymlicka and Eva Pfölstl (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) 9-10.  
 12 Dima Dabbous, “Legal Reform and Women’s Rights in Lebanese Personal Status Laws,” *Chr. Michelsen Institute*, Report nr. 3, September 2017, see: <https://www.cmi.no/publications/6341-legal-reform-and-womens-rights-in-lebanese>  
 Yuksel Sezgin, “The Israeli Millet System: Examining Legal Pluralism through Lenses of Nation-Building and Human Rights,” *Israel Law Review* 43, 3 (October 27, 2011): 631-654.

group membership, should not be accepted in societies that recognize that each individual has equal worth and dignity.<sup>13</sup>

## The Challenge of Political Islam

An ideological challenge currently facing liberal democracy is Political Islam. Many view Islam as an all-encompassing system of a divine law which must be applied to every aspect of human existence, including public and political life. Political Islam, poses two main challenges to liberal democracy, namely the negation of the universality of human rights and freedoms, and secondly the legitimization of the illiberal paradigm as a basis for the good life. Political Islam, of course, goes further in claiming that the good life must be defined by theocratic values as applied by an Islamic political and legal regime.

Such Islamist ideas can be traced to various Sunni and Shia revivalist movements calling for the purification of Islam from un-Islamic elements. It is such movements, including *Salafism* and *Wahabism* that led to the creation of Saudi Arabia, and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran.<sup>14</sup> Many more contemporary Islamist movements draw inspiration from the Society of the Muslim Brothers established in Egypt in 1928. Over several decades the Muslim Brotherhood developed into a transnational religious movement.<sup>15</sup> Rooted in the Brotherhood is the ideology of Qutbism, which today serves as a driving force behind *jihadism*, as it is also referred to. It stems from the collection of writings by the Muslim Brothers, but also other Islamic intellectuals.<sup>16</sup>

Of primary importance in Qutbism is the concept of *jahiliyyah*: the state of ignorance of the guidance from God.<sup>17</sup> According to this concept, Islam is not simply a belief system limited to theological or spiritual realm; it requires total submission to God, and God-given law, in every aspect of human existence, including its public and political realms.<sup>18</sup> All societies, and systems of government based on man-made laws must be abolished, and in their place there should be the establishment of *sharia* rule.<sup>19</sup>

The nostalgia for Islam’s past glory and the re-establishment of its lost supremacy over the world are recurring themes

13 Francis Fukuyama, “Identity, Immigration & Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy* 17, 2 (April 2006): 15.  
 14 John Esposito, “Islamic Fundamentalism,” *SIDIC Periodical XXXII* 3 (1999). see: [http://www.notredamedesion.org/en/dialogue\\_docs.php?a=3b&id=16](http://www.notredamedesion.org/en/dialogue_docs.php?a=3b&id=16)  
 15 Bassam Tibi, “The Totalitarianism of Jihadist Islamism and its Challenge to Europe and to Islam,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 8,1 (March 2007): 39, see: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/14690760601121630>  
 16 Dale C. Eikemeier, “Qutbism: An Ideology of Islamic-Fascism,” *Parameters: Journal of the US Army War College* (Spring 2007), see: <http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/parameters/Articles/07spring/eikemeier.pdf>  
 17 Qutb, *Milestones: Ma’alim fi’l-tareeq*. ed. A.B. al-Mehri (Birmingham: Maktabah. 1964) 33, see: <http://www.kalamullah.com/Books/Milestones%20Special%20Edition.pdf>  
 18 Ibidem, 67.  
 19 Ibid., 55.





in Islamist teachings.<sup>20</sup> The West, perceived as a single, homogenous political and cultural unit, is identified as the main rival and obstacle to Islam's world dominion. Islamists view Western supremacy as a historical anomaly which needs to be reversed. They feel that "the West has deprived Islam of its core function, that is, to lead humanity."<sup>21</sup> Western imperialism is very often cited as the main grievance behind Muslim hostility, even hatred, against the West. Islamists, however, do not oppose imperialism per se, but rather the current balance of power: "What is truly evil and unacceptable is the domination of infidels over true believers. For true believers to rule misbelievers is proper and natural, since this provides for the maintenance of the holy law, and gives the misbelievers both the opportunity and the incentive to embrace the true faith"<sup>22</sup>

From an Islamic perspective, not only is the Western dominance an anomaly; it entails a deep feeling of injustice reinforced by a particular contempt which in Islamist thought is reserved for the West, regarded as an ideological, philosophical and physical enemy.<sup>23</sup> Despite all its intellectual, scientific and technological achievements, Western rationalism and humanist philosophical foundations are perceived as materialistic and void of any spirituality, leading to the "state of animalism". Western reliance on reason and pragmatism, and lack of spiritual and moral values are the prime causes of its decadence and degradation, which in the final result will lead either to its self-destruction or conquest by spiritually superior Islamic civilization.<sup>24</sup>

To be more precise, modernism, and in particular its derivative in the form of a secular nation-state and all institutions, norms and values associated with it, is the product of Western civilization most challenged by Political Islam. Strict division between religion and state, where the former is regarded as a private matter, is perceived by Islamists as an "evil neo-pagan force".<sup>25</sup> The concept of the nation-state has acquired universal appeal, and today constitutes the elementary unit which international system rests upon. Such appeal however is often not supported by the norms and values upon which this concept is based. The historical context, as well as political and cultural processes which led to the emergence of the secular nation-state in the Western world, were absent elsewhere. An alien construct imposed by the Western powers after the Ottoman Empire was dissolved, it

particularly failed to strike roots in the Middle East, leading to the "crisis of legitimacy", today articulated by Islamists.<sup>26</sup>

The series of failures and crises in the Muslim world, such as the humiliating defeats of the Arabs by the infant Israeli state, the Bangladeshi-Pakistani civil war, the Lebanese civil war, or the Iranian Revolution, reinforced the notion of Islamism as an alternative ideology to the Western-exported models of modernization, perceived as a form of neocolonialism.<sup>27</sup> The Iran-Iraq War, as well as the First and Second Iraq Wars later shattered the nation-state model for the Arabs, as did the recent disintegration of Syria and Libya. The rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria can partly be justified with the fact that central to its ideology concept of a caliphate unifying Muslim lands, and replacing regional nation-state system is a powerful idea broadly supported within the Muslim world.<sup>28</sup>

Political Islam, or Islamism, therefore, can be defined as an ideology which aims to fully subordinate politics to religion. It challenges the Western secular order, norms and values, and desires to replace them with an Islamic order of Allah's sovereignty on earth embodied in the *sharia*.<sup>29</sup> The conflict in question is between modernisms, and in particular secularism, including institutions and values it is associated with, and the forces within the Islamic world which reject them. The fall of Communism contributed to the re-emergence of the Islamic model, as a *de facto* competitor to Western dominance over the Islamic world.<sup>30</sup>

Although certain branches of Islamism declare commitment to human rights their conception of how such rights should be defined and applied effectively negates them. Initiatives aiming at constructing alternative human rights discourse, as well as certain governments' reservations with respect to full adoption of specific human rights conventions, often serve as justification for widespread human rights abuse, in particular in the field of gender equality, religious freedom and freedom of speech, in disguise of compliance with Islamic law.<sup>31</sup>

20 Bassam Tibi, "Ballot and Bullet: The Politicisation of Islam to Islamism," Lecture at the Centre for Studies in Islamism and Radicalisation at the Department of Political Science, Aarhus University, Denmark, 9 September 2009.

21 Tibi, *The Challenge*, 15.

22 Bernard Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage," *The Atlantic* (September 1990), see: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1990/09/the-roots-of-muslim-rage/304643/>

23 Luke Loboda, "The Thought of Sayyid Qutb," *Ashbrook Statesmanship Thesis* (2004): 3, see: <http://www.ashbrook.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/2004-Loboda-The-Thought-of-Sayyid-Qutb-PDF.pdf>

24 Ibidem, 11-13.

25 Lewis, "The Roots,"

26 Bassam Tibi, *The Challenge of Fundamentalism* (Berkeley, Calif London: University of California Press, 1998) 6-7; Lewis, "The Roots,"

27 Esposito, "Islamic Fundamentalism"

28 Shadi Hamid, *Islamic Exceptionalism: How the Struggle Over Islam Is Reshaping the World* (St. Martin's Griffin, 2017) 11.

29 Bassam Tibi, "Religious Extremism or Religionization of Politics?" *Radical Islam and International Security. Challenges and Responses*. ed. Efraim Inbar and Hillel Frisch (New York: Routledge, 2008) 13.

30 Tibi, *The Challenge*, 15.

31 Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, "The Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam," Adopted at the Nineteenth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, 31 July to 5 August 1990, see: [https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/Training/Compilation/Pages/2TheCairoDeclarationonHumanRightsinIslam\(1990\).aspx](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/Training/Compilation/Pages/2TheCairoDeclarationonHumanRightsinIslam(1990).aspx); Salam Azzam, Secretary General, "Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights," *The International Journal of Human Rights* 2, 3 (2007); Ann Elizabeth Mayer, "The Islam and Human Rights Nexus: Shifting Dimensions," *Muslim World Journal of Human Rights* 4, 1 (2007): 5-7.

Austin Dacey and Colin Koproske, "Islam & Human Rights. Defending Universality at the United Nations," *Center for Enquiry* (September 2008), see: [https://www.centerforinquiry.net/uploads/attachments/ISLAM\\_AND\\_HUMAN\\_RIGHTS.pdf](https://www.centerforinquiry.net/uploads/attachments/ISLAM_AND_HUMAN_RIGHTS.pdf)



Islamists regard gender equality as a Western concept, and women's rights activists are believed to be driven by a foreign agenda that aims at corrupting Islamic family values, leading to demoralization of the entire society. Based on their interpretation of Islamic law, according to which gender relations rest upon the conviction that men and women have complimentary roles in the society that imply different rights and duties, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood has been consistently opposing reforms aimed at improving the situation of Egyptian women. In particular such issues as polygamy, divorce, child marriage, and female genital mutilation, a practice widespread in Egypt, are often justified on religious grounds.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, women's rights have been declining in Turkey under the rule of the Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP).<sup>33</sup> Numerous statements by the AKP's leadership regarding women, such as that gender equality is "against nature"<sup>34</sup>, or that women that put their careers over motherhood are "half persons"<sup>35</sup>, are indicators of the party's position on women's rights.<sup>36</sup>

Freedom of speech is another issue where Islamism is at odds with international standards of human rights. In Egypt, it is guaranteed as long as it complies with Islamic law. Blasphemy was for the first time explicitly prohibited in the 2012 Constitution, drafted by the Muslim Brotherhood and its Salafist allies, and blasphemy charges increased under President Morsi.<sup>37</sup>

Political Islam is also at odds with the issue of religious freedom. The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt supported and propagated the application of discriminatory principles related to the treatment of religious minorities as stipulated in Islamic law, deepening the discrimination that Christians, Baha'is, Shi'a Muslims, as well as Ahmadis, Quranists and Jehovah's Witnesses have experienced for decades. According to these principles, Christians and Jews, the only religious minorities that deserve recognition as "Abrahamic religions" (or the "People of the Book") should be granted protection by the Islamic state. However, this protection is conditional on their acceptance of the status of second-class citizens. Their subordinate to the Muslim majority position is reflected, among others, in restrictions on constructing places of worship, running for certain public offices (in particular that of head

of state), or exercising certain basic personal freedoms (e.g. prohibition on Muslim women to marry non-Muslim men).<sup>38</sup> With regard to the unrecognized religious minorities, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt has opposed registering their religious affiliation, called for their criminalization, engaged in incitement campaigns leading to violence, and some of their members have stated they should be punished by death.<sup>39</sup>

Similar to Egypt, religious minorities have also experienced discrimination in Turkey. The only religious groups that are granted legal minority status are Jews, Greek Orthodox Christians and Armenian Orthodox Christians. Non-Sunni Muslims, in particular Alevis, the second largest religious group in Turkey after Sunni Muslims, are denied treatment equal to the Sunni majority.<sup>40</sup> Following the 2016 coup attempt against Erdoğan, the Alevis were subject to hate speech, acts of harassment and violence.<sup>41</sup> Similar accusations were made against Turkey's Christians and Jews, who have been portrayed in the pro-Erdoğan media as agents of the West – one of the main culprits behind the coup according to the regime.<sup>42</sup>

### Liberalism and its Detractors: The Illiberal Paradigm

As the Communist Bloc was collapsing, the "end of history" was announced, hailing the universal triumph of the liberal democratic model "as the final form of human government" guaranteeing global peace and prosperity.<sup>43</sup> This theory was later countered by the argument that even in a conducive international environment liberal democracy was not a universally applicable model. Favorable economic and social conditions needed to exist in order for it to take root within a given society. If these conditions are not in place, previously non-democratic states that implement democratic institutions are likely to reverse back into authoritarianism.<sup>44</sup>

Recent global developments seem to validate that argument. Some believed that popular uprisings against authoritarian

32 Moataz El Fegieri, *Islamic Law and Human Rights. The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016) 197-236.

33 Human Rights Watch, "Turkey: Backward Step for Women's Rights. Abolishing Women's Ministry Harms Women's Rights Efforts," 9 June 2011, see: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2011/06/09/turkey-backward-step-womens-rights>

34 "Turkish President Erdoğan Says Gender Equality 'Against Nature,'" *Hürriyet Daily News*, 24 November 2014, see: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-president-erdogan-says-gender-equality-against-nature-74726>

35 F. Brinley Bruton, "Turkey's President Erdoğan Calls Women Who Work 'Half Persons,'" *NBC News*, 8 June 2016, see: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/turkey-s-president-erdogan-calls-women-who-work-half-persons-n586421>

36 BBC, "Turkey President Erdoğan: Women Are Not Equal To Men," 24 November, 2014, see: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30183711>

37 El Fegieri, *Islamic Law and Human Rights*, 120, 125.

38 Traditionally, in return for protection dhimmis were also obliged to pay a poll-tax called jizyah, which also symbolized their submission to the Muslim rule. Abdullahi A. An-Na'im, "Religious Minorities Under Islamic Law and the Limits of Cultural Relativism," *Human Rights Quarterly* 9, 1 (February 1987): 11-12, see: [https://www.jstor.org/stable/761944?read-now=1&loggedin=true&seq=12#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/761944?read-now=1&loggedin=true&seq=12#page_scan_tab_contents)

39 El Fegieri, *Islamic Law and Human Rights*, 168, 170 and 134-171.

40 United States Department of State, "Turkey 2016 International Religious Freedom Report," 5, 7, 10-11, 15, see: <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/269120.pdf>

41 "Responses to Information Requests," Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 26 January 2017, see: <https://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/country-information/riir/Pages/index.aspx?doc=456925&pls=1>

42 Uzay Bulut and Kasim Cindemir, "Christians, Jews in Turkey Growing More Fearful of Islamic Extremism," *Voice of America*, 25 September 2016, see: <https://www.voanews.com/a/christian-jews-in-turkey-growing-more-fearful/3524266.html>

43 Francis Fukuyana, "The End of History?" *The National Interest* (Summer 1989): 1.

44 Samuel P. Huntington, "Democracy's Third Wave," *Journal of Democracy* (Spring 1991).



leaders known as the Arab Spring were another wave of democratization. Eight years later, the legacy of the Arab revolutions include the resurgence of authoritarianism, the rise of religious extremism and sectarianism, economic decline, civil wars, countless of deaths, and displaced persons.

It would seem that the decline of democracy has entered into a global trend. According to the 2017 Democracy Index published annually by the Economist Intelligence Unit, only 19 out of 167 countries covered by the index (less than 5% of the world's population) could be categorized as "full democracies", followed by 57 "flawed democracies", 39 "hybrid regimes", and 52 "authoritarian regimes".<sup>45</sup>

Many controversies and questions regarding liberalism, and in particular human rights doctrine have arisen around the issue of their compatibility with Islam. Syed Abul A'la Maududi, an influential Muslim scholar and the founder of the Pakistani Islamist movement Jamaat-e-Islami, put forward an Islamic concept of human rights, granted by God and based on the Quran and the Sunna. Maududi argued that not only had human rights been embedded and guaranteed in the Islamic tradition since its conception, but they were superior to what he considered to be a Western equivalent that "cannot be compared with the rights sanctioned by God; because the former is not applicable to anybody while the latter is applicable to every believer".<sup>46</sup>

It has been argued that the liberal democratic model may not be applicable outside of the Western context. Principles and institutions indispensable for the functioning of liberal democracy, such as the rule of law, church and state separation, social pluralism, representative bodies and, above all, individual autonomy which gave rise to individual rights and liberties, were all distinctive traits of Western civilization. The concept of "universal civilization" based on supposedly globally-shared values was in fact perceived as justification for Western cultural, political and economic imperialism, as "the non-Wests see as Western what the West sees as universal".<sup>47</sup>

Liberalism's claim to universality has been challenged on the grounds that it fails to appreciate cultural particularities and diverse ways in which social norms, behaviors and institutions are embodied by different cultures. Cultural relativists, among others, believe that all cultural norms, customs and practices are equally valid and no matter how abhorrent they seem to be to the outside observer, they should not be criticized due to lack of universal standards against which they could be judged. It is also argued that an attempt to formulate universal human rights standards stem from North American and Western European ethnocentrism, and such standards are irrelevant in the non-Western cultural contexts in which beliefs

and values seen as essentially Western are not shared.<sup>48</sup> While Western cultures are preoccupied with freedom, personal autonomy and individual rights, Eastern cultures, it is argued, place more value on family, the community, the nation, emphasize hierarchy, paternalism, discipline and order, social and economic over individual rights, as well as the balance between rights and responsibilities.<sup>49</sup>

The issue regarding compatibility of liberal human rights doctrine with Islam is one example of such controversy. Some Muslims reject it on the basis that it is rooted in a secular, man-made way of life that is fundamentally contradictory to Islam and its laws.<sup>50</sup> Others put forward an Islamic concept of human rights which they believe to be superior to its liberal equivalent. There are also those who reject argument in favor of irreconcilability of Islam and liberal democratic values offering interpretations of Islamic scriptures that render them compatible with secularism, gender equality and religious freedom.<sup>51</sup> It is stressed, however, that at the heart of the liberal human rights doctrine lies the emphasis on the individual, which is in contrast to the collectiveness of the Islamic cultural system based on duties and obligations vis-à-vis the community.<sup>52</sup>

## Challenging the Western Model

An important secular challenge to liberal democracy comes in the form of illiberal economic prosperity. It is based on the premise that liberalism is not a necessary precondition to economic development and technological advancement. The Western-led security, political, and economic world-order is increasingly challenged by the emergence of new transactional alternatives to the existing normative frameworks of international cooperation that stress non-interference, respect for "civilizational diversity" and defense of "traditional values".<sup>53</sup> Such alternatives also offer access to financial resources without the structural political and economic reforms required in order to borrow from traditional financial institutions within the Bretton Woods framework.<sup>54</sup>

45 Economist Intelligence Unit, "Democracy Index 2017: Free Speech Under Attack," 2018, 2, see: [http://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/Democracy\\_Index\\_2017.pdf](http://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/Democracy_Index_2017.pdf)

46 Syed Abul A'la Maududi, *Human Rights in Islam* (Lahore: Islamic Publications Ltd., 1977) 12.

47 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (The Free Press, 2002) 66-72.

48 Elizabeth M. Zechenter, "In the Name of Culture: Cultural Relativism and the Abuse of the Individual," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 53, 3 (Autumn, 1997): 323-324; Rhoda E. Howard-Hassmann, "Cultural Absolutism and the Nostalgia for Community," *Political Science Faculty Publications* (1993): 316-317.

49 Michael D. Barr, "Lee Kuan Yew and the 'Asian Values' Debate," *Asian Studies Review* 24, 3 (2007): 310-312.

50 Nazreen Nawaz, "Why Muslims Should Not Use 'Personal Freedom' or 'Human Rights' to Argue Against Niqab Ban (Part 1)," *Hizb ut-Tahrir Britain*, 6 November 2013, see: <http://www.hizb.org.uk/viewpoint/why-muslims-should-not-use-personal-freedom-or-human-rights-to-argue-against-niqab-ban-part-1/>

51 Syed Abul A'la Maududi, *Human Rights in Islam* (Lahore: Islamic Publications Ltd., 1977) 12.

52 Bassam Tibi, "Islamic Law/Shari'a, Human Rights, Universal Morality and International Relations," *Human Rights Quarterly* 16, 2 (May 1994): 289-299.

53 Alexander Cooley, "Authoritarianism Goes Global," *Journal of Democracy* 26, 3 (July 2015): 50-53.

54 Ibidem, 58.





Champions of this counter-model to the liberal democratic international order have started to gain influence in the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean. After a quarter-century long absence, Russia's military intervention in Syria signaled its return to the region. China's economic encroachment on the region encompasses a growing number of states and many fields of cooperation. As international isolation of Iran continues, the Islamic Republic seeks membership in the Russia-China-driven Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), while it focuses on the expansion of the "Shia Crescent" - an Iranian sphere of influence that stretches from Iran through Iraq and Syria down to Lebanon, aimed at challenging the American, Israeli and Saudi power in the region,<sup>55</sup> through a network of political and military proxies. Turkey has also expressed its interest in a SCO membership as the crisis in its relations with the West deepens.

### Turkey's Neo-Ottomanism/Revisionism

Over the last decade and a half, Turkey under Erdoğan's rule has experienced a democratic reversal. Constitutional amendments have abolished any remaining checks and balances and allowed for accumulation of nearly unlimited power in Erdoğan's hands.<sup>56</sup> The crackdown on freedom of speech and expression, violent suppression of peaceful protests, widespread purges of dissidents from the civil service, judiciary, military, media and academia, as well as mass arrests, abductions and torture in police custody have become the sad norm of Erdoğan's regime.<sup>57</sup>

The AKP's Islamization agenda, in particular in the field of education, is undermining the secular foundations of the republic. AKP ideology is firmly rooted in the Turkish religious and political movement called Millî Görüş, or National Vision, established by Necmettin Erbakan, one of the most prominent Islamist activists and politicians in Turkey. Although itself rooted in one of the Sufi orders of Islam, the development of Millî Görüş was influenced by other powerful Islamist movements, mainly the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, and ideologues such as Syed Abul A'la Maududi, Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb. The outlook of Millî Görüş, as elaborated by Erbakan, is anti-liberal, anti-Western, anti-Semitic, pan-Islamic, defining Islam as an all-encompassing way of life which should be accepted by all mankind. While it accepts scientific and technological achievements of the West, it is contemptuous of the philosophical underpinnings of the Western civilization. The Millî Görüş worldview is also conspiratorial and anti-Semitic to the core – it perceives

international institutions and organizations, such as the EU or the UN, as founded and controlled by world Jewry in a bid to establish global Jewish dominance.<sup>58</sup>

Growing authoritarianism of Erdoğan's regime goes hand in hand with enforced re-Islamization of the country. It is most vividly present in Turkey's education sector and in line with his wish "to raise pious generations."<sup>59</sup> The AKP's policies have drastically expanded the religious imam-hatip schools as well as religious content of national curriculum.<sup>60</sup> Turkey also intends to establish an international Islamic university to challenge Egypt's Al-Azhar University's role as the most prominent institution of Islamic education in the world.<sup>61</sup>

The Arab Spring was perceived in Turkey as a golden opportunity to realize the neo-Ottoman dream that existing, secular autocracies would be replaced by Islamist regimes following the Turkish model.<sup>62</sup> However, Turkey miscalculated the outcome of the Arab Spring and its support for Islamist parties quickly backfired. Its backing of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and condemnation of the 2013 military coup, led to mutual withdrawal of ambassadors and relations between the two countries have remained strained ever since.<sup>63</sup> In Syria, Turkey turned against Bashar Al-Assad and sided with the insurgents, including radical jihadi groups, in an unsuccessful attempt to overthrow the regime and replace it with a Sunni, Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated one. Turkey's 2018 military operation against the Kurdish-controlled areas in northern

55 Patrick Clawson, Hanin Ghaddar, and Nader Uskowi, Policy Analysis, "Middle East FAQs Volume 1: What is the Shia Crescent?" The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 17 January 2018, see: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/middle-east-faqs-volume-1-what-is-the-shia-crescent>  
56 Sibel Hurtaş, "Turks Enter Uncharted Waters as Erdoğan Forges Ahead with New Powers," *Al Monitor*, 13 July 2018, see: <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/07/turkey-erdogan-bring-state-institutions-under-his-control.html>  
57 Human Rights Watch, "In Custody: Police Torture and Abductions in Turkey," 12 October 2017, See: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/10/12/custody-police-torture-and-abductions-turkey>

58 Michael A. Reynolds, "The Key to the Future Lies in the Past: The Worldview of Erdoğan and Davutoğlu," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 19, Hudson Institute, 2015, 12; Svante E. Cornell, M. K. Kaya, "Political Islam in Turkey and the Naqshbandi-Khalidi Order," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 19, Hudson Institute, 2015, 51, 53; Eric Edelman, Svante Cornell, Aaron Lobel, Hali Karaveli, "Turkey Transformed: The Origins and Evolution of Authoritarianism and Islamization Under the AKP," Report, Bipartisan Policy Center, October 2015, 16-21.  
59 Alon Ben Meir, "Erdoğan Exploits Islam For Personal And Political Gain," *HuffPost*, 1 March 2017, see: [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/erdogan-exploits-islam-for-personal-and-political-gain-us\\_58b6ed8ce4b0658fc20f9c5c](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/erdogan-exploits-islam-for-personal-and-political-gain-us_58b6ed8ce4b0658fc20f9c5c)  
60 Daren Butler, "Turkey Says Plans to Place Quarter of Top Students in Islamic Schools," *Reuters*, 12 April 2018, see: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-education/turkey-says-plans-to-place-quarter-of-top-students-in-islamic-schools-idUSKBN1HJ2IW>; Lizzie Dearden, "Turkey to Stop Teaching Evolution in Secondary Schools as Part of New National Curriculum," *The Independent*, 23 June 2017. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/turkey-evolution-secondary-school-education-national-curriculum-recep-tayyip-erdogan-regime-a7804016.html>  
61 Michael Kaplan, "Turkey Plans to Establish an Islamic University with a Broader Muslim Curriculum," *The Washington Post*, 23 December 2014, see: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/religion/turkey-plans-to-establish-an-islamic-university-with-a-broader-muslim-curriculum/2014/12/23/a902f030-8adb-11e4-ace9-47de1af4c3eb\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.42addbc80bd7](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/religion/turkey-plans-to-establish-an-islamic-university-with-a-broader-muslim-curriculum/2014/12/23/a902f030-8adb-11e4-ace9-47de1af4c3eb_story.html?utm_term=.42addbc80bd7)  
62 Nathan J. Brown, "The Arab Spring at Five: Updates on Tunisia, Egypt, and Turkey," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 8 February 2016, see: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2016/02/08/arab-spring-at-five-updates-on-tunisia-egypt-and-turkey-pub-62836>  
63 Bilge Nesibe Kotan, "An Overview of Turkish-Egyptian Relations Since the Arab Uprising," *TRT World*, 27 November 2017, see: <https://www.trtworld.com/mea/an-overview-of-turkish-egyptian-relations-since-the-arab-uprising-12658>





Syria further strained relations between the two countries. Turkey's threats of military intervention in northern Iraq against Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) strongholds, as well as uninvited involvement in the 2016 retaking of Mosul from the Islamic State justified on the grounds of Turkey's historical rights to Iraqi city, cast a shadow over its relations with Baghdad.<sup>64</sup>

Erdoğan's views of the future of the Eastern Mediterranean are rooted in Ahmet Davutoğlu's revisionist ideas of a Turkish revival with the regional and global power projection of the old Ottoman state at its prime.<sup>65</sup> To this end, Erdoğan's Turkey has focused upon a new military build-up, with an emphasis on maritime forces that can carry modern Turkish influence to the far corners of its former imperial domains. Turkey's bid to free itself from what it sees as the constraints of the U.S., and the Western alliance, has led it to join forces, albeit opportunistically, with Russian and Iran. Its new strategic objectives are to reach for the energy resources in the Kurdish populated areas of Iraq and Syria, and at the same time, thwart any efforts for the establishment of a Kurdish state. Turkish support of the anti-Assad forces in Syria is not motivated by any love of democratic principles, but rather stems from the desire to participate in the carve-up of a post-Assad Syria. The same motivations drive its behavior in Iraqi Kurdistan where Turkey seeks to eventually replace Iraqi dominance. Similarly Turkish involvement in the collapse of the Kaddafi regime in Libya, and Erdoğan's support of the Muslim brotherhood in Egypt had little to do with the promotion of democratic ideals, and everything to do with the projection of Turkish power and influence in the Eastern Mediterranean, and its access to and control of energy resources.

As far as the Eastern Mediterranean region is concerned, Erdoğan would, therefore, like to promote the kind of authoritarian illiberal democracy that he has constructed for himself in his own country. Added to this illiberal democratic constructivism are the contributions of Putin's Russia, and the Islamic Republic of Iran. At the same time, the West is opting for a pragmatic foreign policy for the region, supporting friendly illiberal and often tyrannical regimes. By refraining to support liberal democratic principles, the West tolerates, and makes economically possible, the unrestrained promotion of theocratic agendas with a distinct anti-Western and anti-democratic character.

64 Orhan Coskun, "Turkish PM Says Troops 30 Km Inside Iraq, Could Move on Kurdish Stronghold," *Reuters*, 8 June 2018, see: <https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/turkey/turkey-says-troops-already-inside-iraq-ready-to-move-on-kurdish-strong-1.6159535>; Tim Arango, Michael R. Gordon, "Turkey's Push to Join Battle for Mosul Inflames Tension With Iraq," *The New York Times*, 23 October 2016, see: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/24/world/middleeast/turkeys-push-to-join-battle-for-mosul-inflames-tension-with-iraq.html>

Ari Khalidi, "Erdoğan Invokes Document That Claims Mosul as Turkish Soil," *Kurdistan 24*, 17 October 2016, see: <http://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/1e9e370c-0585-4aaf-b6dd-ebccb92ca93f/Erdoğan-invokes-document-that-claims-Mosul-as-Turkish-soil>

65 Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu* (Istanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2001).

## Resurgence of Russian Power in the Eastern Mediterranean

During the Cold War, the Middle East constituted one of the theaters of Soviet-American rivalry and the Soviet Union had an established presence in the region. The immediate post-Soviet Union period saw the newly-founded Russian Federation's retreat and the unchallenged regional dominance of the U.S. This state of affairs, however, seems to be coming to an end, as Russia has re-asserted its role of a major player in the Middle Eastern politics.

The 9/11 attacks and the subsequent War on Terror, which brought about the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq signaled a U.S. foreign policy priority for the region that still persist despite the Obama administration's lukewarm response to the challenges of the Arab Spring. In Syria, Russia has grasped the opportunity to fill a perceived western policy void and re-establish itself in the region in line with Vladimir Putin's objective to regain some of Russia's global status.<sup>66</sup>

In Moscow's perception, the Arab Spring was not a shift towards democratization but a force challenging the regional status quo and bringing about chaos and destabilization. Upon the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War, Russia decided to provide the Assad regime with economic, military and diplomatic support. However, its 2015 military intervention in Syria became a real game changer, turning the tables on the Syrian opposition, saving the Syrian regime from losing the war and bringing the conflict to an endgame that will most likely allow Assad to remain in power. The intervention has raised Russia's regional profile, allowing it to gain permanent foothold in Syria, position itself as a major regional player, and challenge the U.S., and NATO's, military supremacy in the region.<sup>67</sup>

Another way for Russia to reassert itself in the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean has been its attempt to capitalize on the rifts between the U.S. and its long-standing allies, in

66 Dmitri Trenin, "Russia in the Middle East: Moscow's Objectives, Priorities and Policy Drivers," Task Force White Paper, Carnegie Moscow Center, 5 April 2016, see: <http://carnegie.ru/2016/04/05/russia-in-middle-east-moscow-s-objectives-priorities-and-policy-drivers-pub-63244>

67 Ibidem; Alina Polyakova, "Russia Is a Great Power Once Again," *The Atlantic*, 26 February 2018, See: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/02/russia-syria-putin-assad-trump-isis-ghouta/554270/> In October 2016 Russia confirmed deployment of S-300 and S-400 air defence systems to Syria, while in December 2017 it signed a deal with Damascus for the expansion of its naval facility in Tartus and air base in Hmeimim establishing foundations for its permanent military presence in Syria. Moscow's increased projection of power has raised concerns in the West that Russia is attempting to establish an A2/AD (Anti-Access/Area Denial) capabilities in the Eastern Mediterranean. "S-300, S-400 Air Defenses in Place: Russian MoD Warns US-led Coalition Not to Strike Syrian Army," *Russia Today*, 6 October 2016, see: <https://www.rt.com/news/361800-russia-syria-usa-aistrikes/>



particular Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Israel.<sup>68</sup> It has used its nuclear technology, as well as its energy and arms deals, to boost its influence in the region.<sup>69</sup> By skillfully maneuvering through the complexities of the Middle Eastern geopolitics, Russia has managed to establish good working relations with all major regimes of the region in an attempt to position itself as a power broker and a viable alternative to the U.S.'s regional dominance, which is perceived by many to be waning. Void of ideological underpinnings, Moscow's Middle Eastern policy is driven by pragmatism and self-interest: "All Moscow's alignments are situational or conditional, serving primarily Russia's regional interests or its larger world-order goals."<sup>70</sup>

## China's Economic Neo-Imperialism

For many years, the Middle Eastern region was considered peripheral to Chinese foreign policy. China's interest in the region started growing in the 1990s and in the recent years its involvement in the region, through trade and investment, research and innovation, and energy has reached unprecedented levels.

China is a net oil importer, and since 2017 the largest oil importer in the world, with half of its supplies coming from the Middle East.<sup>71</sup> In China's first Arab Policy Paper published in 2016, the region was indicated as a transit route for the proposed land and maritime corridors of China's Belt and Road initiative launched in 2013. The initiative's framework, dubbed "1+2+3", places energy as the "core" of cooperation; infrastructure, and trade and investment facilitation as the "two wings"; and nuclear energy, space and clean energy

as the "three breakthroughs."<sup>72</sup> Billions of dollars-worth of investment agreements connected to energy, infrastructure and technology have been recently signed between the Chinese government and the Gulf countries.<sup>73</sup> Closer to the Mediterranean, China has expanded its economic presence in Egypt, where it has become the largest Suez Canal investor, among other projects.<sup>74</sup> In 2016 it acquired 51 % stake in the Port of Piraeus, Greece's largest port.<sup>75</sup> In Israel, China accounts for one-third of all high-tech investments, in addition to a rapidly growing cooperation in infrastructure, education and tourism.<sup>76</sup>

China's vast infrastructure projects are financed through the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) – a China-led multilateral development bank launched in 2013. The AIIB is perceived as a rival institution to the western-dominated international financial institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and hence to the economic order tied to the promotion of liberal democratic worldview.

## Iranian Expansionism

The expansion of Iran's influence in the region has taken two major forms: alliances with like-minded states as well as support for regional non-state actors. Regional developments of the recent decades, in particular the Iraq War and the Arab Spring, have enabled the Iran's to advance its presence in the Eastern Mediterranean region and strengthen its foothold in Lebanon, Iraq and Syria.<sup>77</sup> Despite pan-Islamic ideals propagated by the Iran's leaders, these alliances have

68 Carlotta Gall, Andrew Higgins, "Turkey Signs Russian Missile Deal, Pivoting From NATO," *The New York Times*, 12 September 2017, see: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/12/world/europe/turkey-russia-missile-deal.html>  
Boris Zilberman, Romany Shaker, "Russia and Egypt Are Growing Closer," *The American Interest*, 6 June 2018, see: <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2018/06/06/russia-and-egypt-are-growing-closer/>  
Patrick Wintour, "Saudi King's Visit to Russia Heralds Shift in Global Power Structures," *The Guardian*, 5 October 2017, see: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/05/saudi-russia-visit-putin-oil-middle-east>  
Seth J. Frantzman, "Despite Syria, Israel-Russia Relations Are the Warmest in History," *The Jerusalem Post*, 25 March 2017, see: <https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Despite-Syria-Israel-Russia-relations-are-the-warmest-in-history-485062>

69 Matthew Cottee, Hassan Elbahtimy, "Russia's Nuclear Ambitions in the Middle East," *Foreign Affairs*, 20 May 2016, see: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2016-05-20/russias-nuclear-ambitions-middle-east>  
Nicholas Trickett, "Why Putin's Oil Maneuvers Will Keep Russia in the Middle East," *The Washington Post*, 5 April 2018, See: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/04/05/why-putins-oil-maneuvers-will-keep-russia-in-the-middle-east/?utm\\_term=.46b8cdf6500d](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/04/05/why-putins-oil-maneuvers-will-keep-russia-in-the-middle-east/?utm_term=.46b8cdf6500d)  
Anna Borshchevskaya, "The Tactical Side of Russia's Arms Sales to the Middle East," Policy Analysis, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, December 2017, see: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-tactical-side-of-russias-arms-sales-to-the-middle-east>

70 Trenin, "Russia in the Middle East"

71 EIA, "China Surpassed the United States as the World's Largest Crude Oil Importer in 2017," U.S. Energy Information Administration, 5 February 2018, see: <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=34812>  
EIA, "China," U.S. Energy Information Administration, 14 May 2015, 12, see: <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=34812>

72 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "China's Arab Policy Paper," 13 January 2016, see: [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1331683.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1331683.shtml)

73 Ben Blanchard, "China, Saudi Arabia Eye \$65 Billion in Deals as King Visits," Reuters, 16 March 2017, see: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-asia-china/china-saudi-arabia-eye-65-billion-in-deals-as-king-visits-idUSKBN16N0G9>  
Stanley Carvalho, "Xi's Visit to UAE Highlights China's Rising Interest in Middle East," *Reuters*, 20 July 2018, see: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-uae-emirates-china/xis-visit-to-uae-highlights-chinas-rising-interest-in-middle-east-idUSKBN1KA26K>

74 "China Now Biggest Investor in Suez," *China Daily*, 23 March 2017, see: [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2017-03/23/content\\_28648386.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2017-03/23/content_28648386.htm)  
"Al-Sisi in China to Boost Investments Cooperation," *Daily News Egypt*, 1 September 2018, see: <https://dailynewsegypt.com/2018/09/01/al-sisi-in-china-to-boost-investments-cooperation/>

75 George Georgiopoulos, "China's Cosco Acquires 51 Pct Stake in Greece's Piraeus Port," *Reuters*, 10 August 2016, see: <https://www.reuters.com/article/greece-privatisation-port/chinas-cosco-acquires-51-pct-stake-in-greeces-piraeus-port-idUSL8N1AR252>

76 Elliott Abrams, "What's Behind Israel's Growing Ties With China?" Expert Brief, Council on Foreign Relations, 21 June 2018, see: <https://www.cfr.org/expert-brief/whats-behind-israels-growing-ties-china>

77 Julian Maloney, "How the Iraq War Has Empowered Iran," Op-ed, The Brookings Institution, 21 March 2008, see: <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/how-the-iraq-war-has-empowered-iran/>  
Benjamin Miller, "4 Middle East Events That Helped Expand Iran's Influence," *The National Interest*, 10 December 2017, see: <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/4-middle-east-events-helped-expand-irans-influence-23583?page=0%2C1>



acquired an increasingly sectarian, namely Shiite, character that forms part of the Shia Crescent.

The 2003 invasion of Iraq and the following overthrow of Saddam Hussein regime created instability and power vacuum in a state that had been up to that date considered Iran's major regional rival. The collapse of the Sunni-dominated regime and the following political empowerment of the Iraq's Shias allowed Iran to step into Iraq's political game and exert influence on post-2003 Shia-majority governments through various political parties allied with Iran. Simultaneously, the Islamic Republic has been either creating or empowering already existent violent Iraqi militias through financial support, arms supply and training.<sup>78</sup>

The Syrian-Iranian alliance has been a long-standing one, despite ideological discrepancy.<sup>79</sup> Syria is crucial to Iran's regional interests constituting an important element of Iran's "axis of resistance" against the U.S. and Israeli presence in the region, facilitating weapons storage and transfer to Iran's Lebanese and Palestinian proxies and providing training camps for their fighters.<sup>80</sup> Iran has become heavily involved in the Syrian Civil War, providing the regime forces as well as pro-regime militias with intelligence, military advice, training, supplies and personnel through Islamic Revolutionary Guard

Corps (IRGC) forces and its special forces, also known as the Quds Force.<sup>81</sup> Iran's intention is to maintain a long-term military presence in Syria, potentially including the establishment of military bases.<sup>82</sup>

Since its establishment in the 1980s Iran's main regional proxy Hezbollah has managed to transform itself from an anti-Israeli guerilla group into one of the most significant political movement and social welfare provider in Lebanon supported by a powerful military wing. Its military capability allegedly exceeds that of the Lebanese Arms Forces, and includes 20.000 combatants and up to 150.000 short, medium and long-range rockets and missiles.<sup>83</sup> Similarly to Iran, Hezbollah has been aiding the Assad regime to stay in power, and the organization's involvement in the Syrian war, which has become the largest military operation in its history, has elevated its status from a local terrorist organization to a major regional power.<sup>84</sup>

78 Michael Eisenstadt, Michael Knights, and Ahmed Ali, "Iran's Influence in Iraq: Countering Tehran's Whole-of-Government Approach," Policy Focus No. 111, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, April 2011, 3-6, 8-9, see: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus111.pdf>;

Alireza Nader, "Iran's Role in Iraq: Room for U.S.-Iran Cooperation?" Perspectives, Rand Corporation, 2015, 5-7, See: <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE151.html>

79 While Iran is an Islamic theocracy, the regime of Bashar Al Assad is founded on secularist Baat'thist ideology, despite being dominated by the Alawite Shia sect.

80 Nadav Pollak, "The Transformation of Hezbollah by Its Involvement in Syria," Research Notes No. 35, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, August 2016, 2, see: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/ResearchNote35-Pollak-2.pdf>

81 Will Fulton, Joseph Holliday, and Sam Wyer, "Iranian Strategy in Syria," Institute for the Study of War, 1 May 2013, 10-21.

82 Al-Monitor Staff, "Assad Says He's Open to Establishing Iranian Bases in Syria," Al-Monitor, 14 June 2018, see: <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/06/iran-syria-president-assad-alalam-interview-military-bases.html>

Bozorgmehr Sharafedin, Dan Williams, Gareth Jones and Peter Graff, "Iran Says to Maintain Military Presence in Syria Despite U.S. Pressure," Reuters, 8 August 2018, see: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-iran/iran-says-to-maintain-military-presence-in-syria-despite-u-s-pressure-idUSKCN1LD1JQ>

83 Nicholas Blanford, "Hezbollah's Evolution: From Lebanese Militia to Regional Player," Policy Paper No. 4, Middle East Institute, November 2017, 6, see: [https://www.mei.edu/files/publications/PP4\\_Blanford\\_Hezbollah.pdf](https://www.mei.edu/files/publications/PP4_Blanford_Hezbollah.pdf)

John T. Huddy, "Rockets, Missiles and More: Predicting the Third Lebanon War," The Jerusalem Post, 9 February 2018, see: <https://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Rockets-missiles-and-more-Predicting-the-third-Lebanon-war-542171>

84 Blanford, "Hezbollah's Evolution," 7.



# Cypriot Liberal Democracy and its Challenges

Marta Murzanska & George Chr. Pelaghias

## Post-Colonialism in a Cold War Perspective

In 1960, Cyprus became a field experiment for power-sharing in the Eastern Mediterranean. In less than three years, the experiment failed leading to inter-communal violence, and ultimately to foreign invasion, ethnic cleansing, and occupation of a large part of the Island that has lasted for more than forty years. Nevertheless, since 1977 all UN proposals for the settlement of the Cyprus problem have rested upon the concept of power sharing in the form of a bi-communal, bi-zonal federation.<sup>1</sup>

After hundreds of years of Ottoman rule, decades of British colonialism, and four years of anti-colonial struggle for self-determination, Cyprus became an independent in 1960 as a result of the international Zurich-London Agreements between the UK, Greece and Turkey. Prior to the Agreements, the Greek Cypriots had repeatedly expressed their willingness to unite the island with Greece without success.

The 1960 Cyprus Constitution, a unique example of complexity, incorporated several expressed objectives and one unstated driving purpose. The objectives had to do with addressing the inter-communal dispute that was defined as a central element of the Cyprus problem. The constitution, and the treaties that were an integral part of it, however, served deeper geopolitical and geostrategic needs of the West in the context of the Cold War. After the traumatic experience of the Suez operation of 1956, Britain found itself at odds with U.S. decolonization policies. There was a conscious decision by the British, at the start of the Cyprus liberation struggle in 1956, to try to solicit U.S. assistance for its Eastern Mediterranean and Middle Eastern policies. The British, therefore, decided to redefine the Cyprus problem from being a decolonization dispute that was losing Britain the sympathy of the post-World War II world opinion, to a Cold War problem that put Britain at the front line of Western defense. The contemporary events in Cuba provided the blue print of a possible loss of Cyprus to Soviet power. The result of this British ploy was full U.S. support for a post-colonial Cyprus regime that would ensure that the Soviets could not be able to attain a foothold in Cyprus. The British had craftily cast the Greek Cypriots in the role of the Cubans with archbishop Makarios serving as a Castro-type "Red Pope". Greek Cypriots pro-Soviet proclivities were alleged on the basis of the existence of a powerful communist party

1 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Cyprus of the Republic of Cyprus, "High-Level Agreement of 12 February 1977," See: [http://www.mfa.gov.cy/mfa/mfa2016.nsf/FB80B3D87DE5A915C2257F95002BE30E/\\$file/High%20-%20Level%20Agreement%20-%2012%20February%201977.pdf](http://www.mfa.gov.cy/mfa/mfa2016.nsf/FB80B3D87DE5A915C2257F95002BE30E/$file/High%20-%20Level%20Agreement%20-%2012%20February%201977.pdf)

which the British themselves had nurtured for their own security purposes since its establishment in the early 1920s.<sup>2</sup>

The Western policy on Cyprus which was born in the early 1960s continues to this day and involves the prevention of the Greek Cypriots from turning Cyprus into a base for former Soviet, and current Russian, power in the Eastern Mediterranean. Under the London and Zurich Agreements this was to be accomplished by a constitutional regime that would effectively contain Greek Cypriot freedom of action and abort any eastern tilts that could result from the frustration of their dreams of union with Greece. Turkish irredentism was employed, in the guise of support for a Turkish-Cypriot minority.<sup>3</sup>

This driving purpose determined the nature of the Cyprus power-sharing arrangement, and was embedded in several constitutional provisions that could never be changed. It granted Turkish-Cypriot super-privileges that the Greek-Cypriots were not ready to graciously accept, and the Turkish-Cypriots were not ready to sparingly exercise accommodation and compromise, which was necessary for a successful consociational power-sharing regime. That regime, however, was accepted by all outside powers with interests over Cyprus' future developments, viewing the difficulties and the ambiguities of the constitution as providing the best service for their own interests.

The structure of the regime exacerbated the inter-ethnic cleavages that served Turkish interests, but also as far as the Greek community was concerned led to intra-ethnic factions that were exploited by foreign powers to serve their Cold War interests. After the 1964 collapse of the power sharing aspect of the Cyprus state, international efforts were initiated to contain the Republic of Cyprus, and guide the parties back to the London-Zurich arrangement. Tacit acceptance of the 1974 Turkish invasion, and its continuing aftermath as well as all efforts since then to "reunify" the island under a new power-sharing regime, can best be understood in this context.

2 For the analysis of documents related the Cyprus problem drawn from the National Archives of Great Britain, see William Mallinson, *Britain and Cyprus: Key Themes and Documents Since World War II* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011) 87-121; see also Laurance M. Stern, *The Wrong Horse - The Politics of Intervention and the Failure of American Diplomacy* (New York: Times Books, 1977); George W. Ball, "Cyprus," *The Past Has Another Pattern: Memoirs* (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1983) 337-359; Brendan O'Malley, Ian Craig, *The Cyprus Conspiracy: America, Espionage and the Turkish Invasion* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 1999); Fanoula Argyrou, *Conspiracy or Blunder? The Evolution of a Bizonal Bicomunal Federation in Cyprus* (Nicosia: Adouloti Kyrenia, 2000).

3 Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik*, 179.





## Power-Sharing

Power-sharing has been seen as a tool for conflict-management in societies deeply divided along religious, ethnic or other lines. The concept involves complex government mechanisms, a technocratic rather than an ideological approach, and relies on political practices that involve accommodation and compromise. The theory was developed in a specific cultural and political context, which makes its successful application questionable in different settings. Power-sharing requires an environment of cooperation and trust, a shared vision of a common future and a genuine commitment on all sides. The viability of power-sharing also depends on a favorable international environment. External actors are required to play a constructive role in drafting and implanting power-sharing agreements, and in constructing a post-conflict democratic state.

The formulation of a non-geographic, administrative based power-sharing regime, as applied to Cyprus in 1960, was developed by Gerhard Lembruch, Arend Lijphart, Eric A. Nordlinger, Hans Daalder, and others, became known as consociationalism.<sup>4</sup> Lijphart identified the main elements of consociationalism as: executive power-sharing in a grand elite coalition of representatives of the various ethnic communities; separation and balance between executive and legislative powers; adequate minority representation; a multi-party system; proportional representation; territorial or non-territorial administrative separation and decentralization; and most importantly a minority veto. Lijphart stressed that the entire exercise depends upon a "self-denying hypothesis," leading elites into a grand coalition.<sup>5</sup>

Consociationalism, therefore, rests on a conscious inter-elite accommodation, a kind of elite cartel that relies upon the electoral system to ensure that no single actor gets an independent mandate. All political actors are forced to seek security in coalition with other groups. Governmental powers must be narrowly circumscribed, with mutual vetoes and concurrent majorities in matters affecting core values. At the same time consociational societies must opt for technocratic rather than ideological approaches to most matters, even those requiring political decisions. The problem is that such politics of bargaining behind closed doors reduces the importance

of elections and the accountability of political leaders, and presupposes a rather passive electorate.<sup>6</sup>

Some scholars question the viability of power-sharing in divided societies when applied after intense civil strife. Empowerment of disruptive leader's power-sharing deadlocks and general governmental inefficiency, inflexibility and inadaptability are some of the challenges of a consociational model. A culture of accommodation and compromise, sincere commitment to power-sharing strong and effective state structures, economic prosperity and equality, stable demographics, as well as a stable international environment and constructive role of external actors are indispensable conditions for the viability of a power-sharing model. Such conditions are, however, absent in the societies emerging from violent conflicts.<sup>7</sup>

Another important drawback is that consociationalism reinforces group identities, and divisions preventing development of a common national identity. Such sectarianism often fosters patronage and clientelism. Moreover, communal autonomy of religious sects grants them authority over personal status laws covering matters of marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance, therefore, undermining civil rights of individuals. Such sectarianism creates parallel societies. An example of such power sharing problems is Lebanon, a country which is perpetually failing, but never quite fails, and that has often come dangerously close to civil war.<sup>8</sup> Consociational theories also fail to take into account the transnational nature of religious and ethnic allegiances.<sup>9</sup> In the Middle East, religious conflict does not recognize sovereign borders.<sup>10</sup>

The problem with power-sharing, therefore, is one of context. Any system, or structure, by definition is dependent upon accommodation, compromise and above all tolerance of another's point of view be it political or religious. On the same token a system becomes extremely vulnerable if it is applied in an environment that lacks these characteristics. Disagreements quickly turn into conflicts unless there are mechanisms for dispute resolutions that are allowed to

4 Gerhard Lembruch, "A Non-Competitive Pattern of Conflict Management in Liberal Democracies: The Case of Switzerland, Austria and Lebanon," *Consociational Democracy: Political Accommodation in Segmented Societies*, ed. Kenneth D. McRae (McClelland and Stewart, 1974) 90-97; Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977); Arend Lijphart, *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968); Arend Lijphart, "Typologies of Democratic Systems," *Comparative Political Studies* 1,1 (1968): 3-44; A. Nordlinger, "Conflict Regulation in Divided Societies," Occasional Papers No. 29, Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, 1972; Hans Daalder, "The Consociational Democracy Theme," *World Politics* 26, 4 (1974): 604-621.

5 Arend Lijphart, "The Belgian Example of Cultural Coexistence in Comparative Perspective," *Conflict and Coexistence in Belgium: The Dynamics of a Culturally Divided Society*, ed. Arend Lijphart (Berkeley: University of California, 1981) 1-13.

6 Daalder, "The Consociational Democracy Theme," 607-609.

7 Donald Rothchild and Philip G. Roeder, "Power Sharing as an Impediment to Peace and Democracy," *Sustainable Peace: Power and Democracy After Civil Wars*, ed. Philip G. Roeder and Donald Rodichild (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005) 29-50.

8 Habib Malik, "The Future Cyprus Settlement: Lessons from Lebanon," European Rim Policy and Investment Council, 28 September 2015, see: <https://erpic.org/portfolio-post/the-future-cyprus-settlement-lessons-from-lebanon-interview-with-associate-professor-habib-malik-september-24-2015/>

Makdisi, Samir Makdisi and Marcus Marktanner, "Trapped by Consociationalism: The Case of Lebanon," *Topics in Middle Eastern and North African Economies* 11 (2009), see: <https://commons.luc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1118&context=meea>

9 Marisa Sullivan, "Hezbollah in Syria," *Middle East Security Report* 19. Institute for the Study of War, April 2014; Raphaël Lefèvre, "The Roots of Crisis in Northern Lebanon," Research Report, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 2014, see: [https://carnegieendowment.org/files/crisis\\_northern\\_lebanon.pdf](https://carnegieendowment.org/files/crisis_northern_lebanon.pdf)

10 Sally Nelson, "Is Lebanon's Confessional System Sustainable?" *Journal of Politics and International Studies* 9 (2013): 364.



function properly. Yet, in an environment of mistrust where ulterior motives and hidden agendas of both local and foreign actors determine political behavior, no dispute resolving mechanism – no matter how ingenious – will be able to avert conflict, and ultimate systemic breakdown.

Without dismissing the responsibility of both sides of the Cyprus ethnic and religious divide, one cannot avoid blaming the vulnerable constitutional mechanisms built into the system, which were used to accommodate both domestic and foreign divisive agendas. Geographical division, whether pre-existing or as a consequence of a post-conflict power sharing agreement, is often an issue of great importance. Concerns over ultimate secession of a geographically defined community may easily become a source of violent conflict. Separation of powers in the context of a unitary state or a federal or confederate system, are issues that require tolerance, compromise and accommodation. The absence of such ingredients, especially when compounded by the presence of outside factors, irredentist, revanchist, or expansionist agendas, does not bid well for the success of a power sharing regime.

The initial challenges to Cyprus liberal democracy were related to the power sharing character, and from the international, and regional context in which it has been applied. The lesson to be drawn from the Cyprus experience is that liberal democratic values are diluted, or even qualified, only at the risk of destroying the delicate balances that define liberal democracy itself. The efforts to implement power sharing during the years 1960-1963 failed, causing a violent inter-ethnic conflict. Intense involvement by Greece and Turkey over the Cyprus dispute caused deep concerns for Western security in the Eastern Mediterranean. An attempt to topple the Republic of Cyprus in 1974 by the junta in Greece was followed by a Turkish invasion that occupied and ethnically cleansed 37% of the northern part of the island from its Greek inhabitants, and at the same time orchestrated the migration of Turkish Cypriots from their southern homes to the north.

Despite this traumatic experience, the Republic of Cyprus continued to function, retaining its internationally recognized status.<sup>11</sup> Over the next four decades the Republic of Cyprus developed into a pluralist, liberal, democratic state incorporating the values, principles, regulations and practices of the European Union, whose full member it became in 2004. Its population today is multicultural, with guaranteed freedoms for a variety of ethnic and religious groups.

Nevertheless, the constitutional model of bi-communal power sharing continues to be the formula for the Cyprus reunification efforts, supported by all the main parties of the dispute. The problem with this formula, however, is that while it grants a privileged minority status to Turkish Cypriots, it disregards other minorities and ignores the diversity of the Cypriot population. It leads to discrimination of those citizens

11 UN Security Council, "Security Council Resolution 367 (1975) [The Situation in Cyprus]," 12 March 1975, S/RES/367 (1975), see: <https://undocs.org/S/RES/367>; UN Security Council, "Security Council Resolution 541 (1983)," 18 November 1983, S/RES/541 (1983), see: [https://undocs.org/S/RES/541\(1983\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/541(1983)).

of Cyprus that identify themselves as neither Greek Orthodox, nor Turkish Muslim. This refers not only to the constitutionally recognized religious groups, namely the Latins, the Armenians and the Maronites, but also to many other national, ethnic and religious minorities such as Roma, Jews, and many expatriates from Europe, Middle East, and Asia.<sup>12</sup>

The 1960 Constitution, which is still in force in the Republic of Cyprus, defines the "Greek Community" as citizens of Greek origin and Greek-Orthodox faith or who share the Greek cultural traditions and whose mother tongue is Greek, and the "Turkish Community" as citizens of Turkish origin and Muslim faith or who share the Turkish cultural traditions and whose mother tongue is Turkish. The Constitution requires citizens who are excluded from these definitions to choose to belong to either of the two communities, either individually, or collectively as members of one of the recognized religious groups, namely the Maronites, the Armenians and the Latins. Therefore, being a Cypriot citizen means that one is coerced to endorse one of the two constitutionally recognized identities defined along ethno-religious lines, which amounts to a form of institutional discrimination and cultural assimilation. This leads to the "paradox of consociationalism", where commitment to cultural heterogeneity at the national level enforces homogeneity at the subnational level.<sup>13</sup>

Similar to other countries of the region, Cyprus has yet to rid itself of its Ottoman past. The historical roots of bi-communalism in Cyprus can be traced back to the millet system. It resembles in some aspects the "Islamic bi-compartmentalization", which foresees classification of territories into those which are ruled by Islam, and those where Islam has not established itself yet.<sup>14</sup> It gives legitimacy to the Islamist worldview which maintains that Western and Islamic civilizations are at odds with each other, while liberal democracy with its central tenet of empowerment of an individual is inherently incompatible

12 Andrekos Varnava, "The State of Minorities in Cyprus: Cultural Diversity, Internal-Exclusion and the Cyprus Problem", essay presented at the Tenth International Conference on Diversity in Organisations, Communities and Nations, Queen's University Belfast, 12-21 July 2010; Costas M. Constantinou, "Aporias of identity: Bi-communalism, Hybridity and the 'Cyprus Problem'", *Cooperation and Conflict*, September 1, 2007.

13 Costas M. Constantinou, "Aporias of Identity..." 247.

14 Ahmet Davutoglu, the former Prime Minister of Turkey argued that Islam and the West represent two contrasting, irreconcilable and competing worldviews, stemming from fundamentally different philosophical, methodological and theoretical backgrounds. Such contrasting worldviews have been translated into alternative political cultures, different socio-political systems with differing approaches to the legitimacy of political authority, the idea of pluralism, and, lastly, the concept of universality expressed by the separation between *dar al-Islam*, and *dar al-Harb*. Davutoglu juxtaposes the nation-state based system with the "Islamic bicompartamentalization", which describes international order as *dar al-Islam* ("where the divine responsibility of man could be performed according to the rules of *fiqh*", in other words lands governed by the Islamic law), and *dar al-Harb* ("where Muslims do not have such an opportunity"). The essence of Davutoglu's alternative paradigm is that there is a legitimate non-Western, non-liberal democratic path to national and state growth, good government, economic prosperity, and even modernity. Ahmet Davutoglu, *Alternative Paradigms. The impact of Islamic and Western Weltanschauungs on Political Theory* (Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America, 1994).



with Islam. It is in line with Islamist segregationist tactic applied elsewhere to create parallel societies where Muslims would be isolated and prevented from integrating into the non-Muslim society which flies in the face of modern, liberal pluralist society. It creates favorable conditions for introducing legal pluralism under which citizens would not be equal before the law and some would be exposed to discrimination in the name of religious freedom

In such conditions, the development of a common Cypriot civic identity, built around a shared citizenship that would bridge ethno-religious loyalties will be impossible. In addition, it may yet again make the Republic of Cyprus prone to unwelcomed external interference, this time in the form of transnational Islamic fundamentalism. The anachronistic and illiberal model of communalism is clearly inapplicable to a diverse, multicultural society of Cyprus.<sup>15</sup>

Over the last 40 years, Cypriot democracy has developed in the absence of power sharing. Any efforts to re-establish a power sharing regime should be accompanied by serious efforts to ensure that all the pre-conditions for power sharing exist and/or are put in the place, and that conflict avoidance, and consensus building mechanisms, and institutions, do not operate at the cost of liberal democratic values and principles.

## Political Corruption and the Failure of Liberal Democratic Values

Definitions of the term corruption include “dishonest or illegal behavior by officials or people in positions of power,”<sup>16</sup> “the abuse of entrusted power for private gain,”<sup>17</sup> “the action or effect of making someone or something morally depraved”<sup>18</sup>, “a process that falsifies the essence of something”, or more generally “a process of decay”<sup>19</sup>.

In a social context corruption refers to the falsification, abuse, manipulation and subversion of values, and principles that form the fabric of society. It is a deviation from the deeper sense of natural morality, and the understanding of right and wrong. It often expresses itself through the exercise of undue influence in the public decision-making process in return for monetary or other benefits. The motivations for corruption are related to human weaknesses, and human desires, and are also related to a natural cycle of creation, and ultimate destruction that characterizes most human enterprises.

15 As of 2016, foreign residents constituted close to 16% of the island’s overall population. Statistical Service, “Demographic Report,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus, 2016, See: [http://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/All/6C25304C1E70C304C2257833003432B3/\\$file/DEMOGRAPHIC\\_REPORT-2016-271117.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/All/6C25304C1E70C304C2257833003432B3/$file/DEMOGRAPHIC_REPORT-2016-271117.pdf?OpenElement)

16 “Corruption,” def. 1, Macmillan Dictionary, See: [https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/corruption#corruption\\_1](https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/corruption#corruption_1)

17 “What is Corruption?” Transparency International, see: <https://www.transparency.org/what-is-corruption#define>

18 “Corruption,” def. 1.1, Oxford Living Dictionaries, see: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/corruption>

19 Ibidem, def. 3.

Corruption can be on a grand scale, at the highest level of government, or at a petty everyday interaction between low and mid-level public servants and citizens.<sup>20</sup> Political corruption therefore involves the abuse of power, and has a detrimental effect on society and the moral, political and legal rules that keep it functioning effectively.<sup>21</sup>

Sources of corruption in liberal democratic regimes are related to the internal problems of liberal democratic systems: namely, the failings of the legal and constitutional order, and are often amplified by the historical behavioral patterns of the society. The historical experiences of a society that gave rise to its political culture determine social susceptibility to, or acceptance and tolerance of corruption in the first place. Such local tendencies, however, are often compounded by foreign political and economic agendas.

In Cyprus, corruption is clearly related to the country’s historical experiences. The presence of an abusive and highly exploitative Ottoman tax and administration system, for the better part of 300 years, instilled a deep social need to subvert the system. Especially, by the non-Muslim subjects of the Empire who were the target of exorbitant taxes, and who quickly learnt that even the smallest government benefit bore a high price commanded by corrupt officials. Almost 100 years of British colonial rule did a lot to change the “bribery – based” Ottoman social order, introducing the concept of a professional civil service, and a legal system dedicated to the rule of law. The application of English law, albeit serving British colonial interest, was still a far cry from the dehumanizing Ottoman experience.

British colonial rule, in turn, gave way to the power sharing constitutional experiment of 1960, which was meant to reconcile the ethnic and religious conflict that the British left behind between the main Cypriot communities so enabling them to live in peace. For the first time since the Persian conquest of the Island Cypriots, free from colonial rule, were left to navigate the treacherous waters of the modern world. A world that had just emerged from the tragedy of the Second World War plunged into the ideological and geopolitical conflict of the Cold War. Henceforth, the internal stresses, strains of an untested governing system, social habits, traditions and experiences of a population whose centuries-old suffering had become part of its collective personality, encountered a new type of foreign domination of its domestic affairs.

Over the next half century systemic inefficiencies, social inequities, human weaknesses and excesses, were compounded by a series of political, military and economic disasters that shook public confidence in the country’s institutions, and undermined national and personal pride. The near collapse of the Republic in 1964, the Turkish invasion,

20 “How Do You Define Corruption?” Transparency International, see: <https://www.transparency.org/what-is-corruption#define>

21 Joseph Nye, “Corruption and Political Development: A Cost-Benefit Analysis,” *Political Corruption: A Handbook*, eds. Arnold J. Heidenheimer, Michael Johnston and Victor T. LeVine, (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1989) 966.





and geographical division of the Island in 1974, the waves of homeless destitute refugees of the invasions' aftermath, a stock-market meltdown in 2003, followed by a collapse of the banking system in 2013, only confirmed to a desperate and struggling population the absence of fairness, and even morality, from a system that was at the mercy of forces beyond their control. However, other than the occasional expression of fatalistic despair, they conveniently ignored their own degree of responsibility in allowing this to come to pass.

The pride of a people that won a social contract with their Sovereign has been absent, and for whom the rule of law was a reflection of their belief in themselves, and the system they built to govern their lives. This was a society that had to rely once more on traditional kinship methods of social and economic survival, and their modern expressions of nepotism and clientelism. Corruption, therefore, gradually found fertile ground in a broad spectrum of social, political and economic activities, involving state and municipal government and its links with private enterprise. Political parties entered the fray, institutionalizing corruption, rendering it acceptable, and even expected.

One interesting observation is relevant for the period 2003 – 2015. During this time, the citizens of the Republic, particularly the Greek Cypriot community, came under intense pressure to agree to abandon the Republic of Cyprus in favor of a new constitutional power-sharing order that ostensibly reunited the Island. Setting aside the merits of the new proposed regime, this greatly depressed the general morale of the population, and created doubts as to the ability of the Republic to satisfy basic needs of security and long-term welfare. It also brought to mind all the smaller failings, as well as the economic and social inequities that were now blamed upon the system with renewed vigor. It was as if the citizens themselves were trying to justify their abandonment of the Republic, and all it stood for, by focusing on its shortcomings. At the same time the external threats, especially those emanating from Turkey, further emphasized the inadequacies of the State and undermined its sovereignty, international legitimacy and standing, especially in the minds of its own citizens.

Studies measuring the degree of actual and perceived corruption in the Republic of Cyprus have rendered alarming findings. Cyprus has been consistently ranking among the countries with the highest corruption perception in the EU. According to a 2017 survey, 94% respondents believed corruption was a widespread problem in Cyprus.<sup>22</sup> Half of those polled stating it affected them personally.<sup>23</sup> Nearly nine in ten Cypriots surveyed believing that corruption existed in public institutions at national and local levels,<sup>24</sup> and nine in ten agreed that public services were easiest obtained

22 European Commission (EC), "Special Eurobarometer 470: Corruption," Report, October 2017, 17.

The rates for the previous polls were as follows: 93% in 2005, 90% in 2007, 94% in 2009, 97% in 2011, 78% in 2013, 94%.

23 Ibidem, 26.

24 Ibid., 37.

through bribery and the use of connections – the highest such perception in the EU.<sup>25</sup>

Despite adopting a number of measures aimed at tackling corruption in Cyprus, the anti-corruption legal framework that exists for this purpose remains insufficient. For example, lobbying regulations in Cyprus have not been implemented yet, placing it among the European countries with the lowest ranks of transparent and ethical lobbying, leaving decision-makers prone to unwarranted influence.<sup>26</sup> Public consultation and participation in decision-making is also very low.<sup>27</sup> Regulations regarding assets disclosure by public officials remain inadequate.<sup>28</sup> In addition, no freedom of information law exists in Cyprus posing a further challenge to transparency.

Banking over-regulation, especially after the banking collapse of February 2013 turned the Cyprus banking system from a laissez-faire, intensely competitive system, into a restricted, cumbersome, exploitative, money-lending operation. By cutting off the flow of credit rather than curing the problems of banking and financial corruption, the new regulatory regime caused more corruption. Long lists of politically exposed persons, and their friends and relatives, had their bad loans excused and new financial facilities approved.<sup>29</sup> High-profile court cases further highlighted the problem of corruption at the high levels of governance.<sup>30</sup>

Political cronyism, where job allocation and promotion in the civil service sector depend on connections or party allegiance, has developed into a particularly insidious form of corruption.<sup>31</sup> Multiple pensions for government jobs held simultaneously have become the hallmark of such government and party cronyism and systemic abuse.<sup>32</sup>

In the Cypriot case, as elsewhere, the citizens' willingness to submit to the rule of law undoubtedly depends on whether or not both the law and its administration are fair. An additional conclusion from the Cyprus experience is that

25 Ibid., 43.

26 Suzanne Mulcahy, "Lobbying in Europe: Hidden Influence, Privileged Access," Report, Transparency International, 2015, 27, 39, see: [https://www.transparency.org/whatwedo/publication/lobbying\\_in\\_europe](https://www.transparency.org/whatwedo/publication/lobbying_in_europe)

27 Ibidem, 49.

28 Group of States Against Corruption (GRECO), "Corruption Prevention in Respect of Members of Parliament, Judges and Prosecutors. Evaluation Report: Cyprus," Council of Europe, 27 July 2016, 20-21.

29 Newsroom Iefimerida.gr, "Όλη η λίστα της ντροπής: Σε ποιους χάρισαν δάνεια στην Κύπρο," *Ιεφημερίδα*, 29 March 2013, see: <https://bit.ly/2OMUwdh>

30 Elias Hazou, "Five Guilty in CyTA Scam," *Cyprus Mail*, 23 December 2014, see: <https://cyprus-mail.com/2014/12/23/five-guilty-in-cyta-scam/> Former Staff, "Erotokritou and Others Found Guilty, Judges Found Defence Witnesses Unconvincing (Updated)," *Cyprus Mail*, 8 February 2017, see: <https://cyprus-mail.com/2017/02/08/criminal-court-delivering-verdict-rikkos-trial/>

31 CM: Our View, "Our View: Nepotism is the Root Cause of Public-Sector Problems," *Cyprus Mail*, 24 September 2017, see: <https://cyprus-mail.com/2017/09/24/view-nepotism-root-cause-public-sector-problems/>

32 Philippos Mannaris, "The Cypriot Pension System: Adequacy and Sustainability," *Cyprus Economic Policy Review* 6, 2 (2012): 50, see: [https://ucy.ac.cy/erc/documents/Mannaris\\_49-58-new.pdf](https://ucy.ac.cy/erc/documents/Mannaris_49-58-new.pdf)





corruption depends upon the way the citizen views his state, his government, his own security under it, and its status in the international community. Given the profound social effects of political corruption, it is necessary to sustain the public's belief in its values, its principles, and the national causes.

## The Long Shadow of Erdoğan's Turkey

Since the invasion of Cyprus in 1974, the Turkish-occupied and internationally-isolated northern territories of the island have been politically and economically dependent on Turkey.<sup>33</sup> Political upheavals in Turkey have not remained without impact in the occupied areas of Cyprus, and repressions against individuals linked to Erdoğan's political opponents were indeed extended to the north of the island.<sup>34</sup>

Part of Erdoğan's power grab in Turkey has been a takeover of the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet). The directorate was founded upon the establishment of Turkish Republic as a means for the state to supervise religious affairs of the newly secularized country. Diyanet has been one of the key institutions of modern Turkey, however over the recent years with the AKP's support it has significantly expanded its influence in Turkish public sphere in pursuit of the Islamization agenda which it shares with the Turkish Islamist regime.

Diyanet's outreach extends beyond Turkey's borders. The directorate provides religious services to Turkish and Muslim minorities in Europe, Central Asia, Latin America, and Africa and increasingly in the Middle East. International expansion of the directorate is related to Erdoğan's ambitions to become the leader of the global Muslim umma.<sup>35</sup> There has been growing evidence that Erdoğan has been using Diyanet to infiltrate and exert an influence on Turkish diaspora in Europe. Diyanet has been active in Europe since the late 1970s, providing Turkish mosques with imams in order to meet religious needs of Turkish minorities. In the early 1980s, it began to establish

its network of DITIBs (Diyanet İşleri Türk İslam Birliği - Turkish Islamic Union of the Directorate for Religious Affairs) - umbrella organizations and mosque associations.<sup>36</sup>

In 2016, following the coup attempt in Turkey, allegations emerged in several European countries that DITIB had been involved in intelligence operations on behalf of Turkey aimed at identifying opponents of Erdoğan.<sup>37</sup> These developments have raised serious concerns among European leaders regarding Turkey's influence exerted over the Turkish diaspora. The former German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble warned that Erdoğan was undermining the process of Turkish minority's integration into the German society. Indeed, Erdoğan has repeatedly warned European citizens of Turkish origin against the dangers of assimilation, calling it "a crime against humanity" and emphasizing the importance of maintaining the connection between the diaspora and the Turkish homeland.<sup>38</sup> The 2017 Turkish constitutional referendum results showed that Erdoğan and his authoritarian policies do enjoy a significant support among the European Turks.<sup>39</sup>

Similar to actions taken in Turkey, the Turkish regime has been applying a policy of Islamization of education system in the occupied part of Cyprus. In 2009 religious education was made compulsory in public schools along the establishment of religious schools and educational institutions, while the number of mosques exceeded that of schools.<sup>40</sup> The newly-constructed on the outskirts of Nicosia massive Hala Sultan mosque is the most vivid symbol of Turkey's attempt to

- 33 Ahmet Özyigit, "The Impact of Aid on the Economy of Northern Cyprus," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 40, 2 (May 2008): 185-187, see: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/international-journal-of-middle-east-studies/article/impact-of-aid-on-the-economy-of-northern-cyprus/1CB23AD87811F03B8CA0A532E4657902>
- Petros Savvides, "The Semantics Behind the 'Water of Peace': Strengthening the Dependence of 'TRNC' on Anatolia," Eastern Mediterranean Policy Note No. 3, Cyprus Center for European and International Affairs, 16 February 2016, see: [https://cceia.unic.ac.cy/wp-content/uploads/EMPN\\_3.pdf](https://cceia.unic.ac.cy/wp-content/uploads/EMPN_3.pdf)
- Direnç Kanol, "Quality of Democracy in Unrecognized States: Lessons from Northern Cyprus," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 17, 3 (2017): 389-402, see: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14683857.2017.1279257?src=recsys&journalCode=fbss20>
- 34 Staff Reporter, "Three More Arrests in the North With Alleged Gulen Ties," *Cyprus Mail*, 10 August 2017, see: <https://cyprus-mail.com/2017/08/10/three-arrests-north-alleged-gulen-ties/>
- Stockholm Center for Freedom, "Turkish Court Imposes Jail Sentences on 342 People Over Alleged Links to Gülen Movement," April 25, 2018, See: <https://stockholmcf.org/turkish-court-imposes-jail-sentences-on-342-people-over-alleged-links-to-gulen-movement/>
- 35 Ceren Lord, "The Story Behind the Rise of Turkey's Ulema," *Middle East Research and Information Project*, February 4, 2018, see: <https://www.merip.org/mero/mero020418>

- 36 Thijl Sunier and Nico Landman, *Transnational Turkish Islam. Shifting Geographies of Religious Activism and Community Building in Turkey and Europe* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) 50.
- 37 Paul Hockenos, "Erdoğan's International Network of Muslim Cleric Spies," *Foreign Policy*, 27 March 2017, see <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/03/27/erdogans-international-network-of-muslim-cleric-spies-turkey-germany-gulen-coup/>
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- 38 Harry de Quetteville in Berlin, "Turkish PM Speaks Out Against Assimilation," *The Telegraph*, 12 February 2008, see: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1578451/Turkish-PM-speaks-out-against-assimilation.html>
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- 39 TRT World, "Why Many Turkish Citizens in Europe Rallied Behind the 'Yes'Vote," 20 April 2017, see: <https://www.trtworld.com/turkey/heres-why-many-turkish-citizens-in-europe-rallied-behind-yes-vote-339295>
- 40 "Letter Dated 3 October 2017 From the Permanent Representative of Cyprus to the United Nations Addressed to the Secretary-General," Nr. A/72/507-S/2017/831, General Assembly Security Council, 5 October 2017, see: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N17/311/63/PDF/N1731163.pdf?OpenElement>
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increase religious character of the occupied Cyprus.<sup>41</sup> The Permanent Representative of Cyprus to the United Nations warned in a 2017 letter to the Secretary-General that Turkey's policy aimed at changing the demographics of the island has brought thousands of illegal settlers from Anatolia who "consciously or unconsciously assume the role of a catalyst for the advancement and implementation of AKP policies intended to further integrated the Turkish Cypriot community

41 Helena Smith, "We're Not Muslim Enough! Fear Turkish Cypriots as Poll Looms," *The Guardian*, 6 January 2018, see: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/06/were-not-muslim-enough-fear-turkish-cypriots-as-poll-looms>

into Turkey and to 'Turkify' the occupied areas of Cyprus, with far reaching repercussions in the Government-controlled areas of the Republic."<sup>42</sup>

In this context, it is of crucial importance to the Republic of Cyprus to carefully consider the future implications and consequences of the proposed settlement to the Cyprus problem based on the division of the Republic's de facto multicultural and pluralist society into two communities defined along ethno-religious lines, with Turkey extending its influence and protectorate over one of those communities.

42 "Letter Dated 3 October 2017".





# The Future of Democracies in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: A Greek Perspective

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## Introduction: The General Setting

Concrete steps in the last three years have set the foundations of an Eastern Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) comprising Israel, Greece, and Cyprus. The convergence of the three nations is the natural outcome of close democratic similarities and desires for stability and progress in a region tortured by the perennial Middle East crisis and radical Islamism. We recommend the EMP focuses on energy, environmental quality, scientific research, communications, and strengthening of across-the-board economic and security relations. The three partners should aim to strengthen and systematize their cooperation. The EMP, when and if it assumes a concrete form, should be an important contribution to the stability of the Eastern Mediterranean and the promotion of peace and prosperity.

The election of Donald Trump and the fracturing of American “constants” the post-WWII world considered permanent; the resurgence of Russian imperial intentions and military projection into the “warm waters” of the Mediterranean; the utter chaos in the Islamic world; terrorist instability along the North African rim and the explosion of illegal immigration and human trafficking in the wake of Libya’s collapse into chaos, with Asiatic and African throngs trying to force the gates of Europe; and unstable, adversarial, and conflictual politics throughout the Arab world combine to present the potential EMP partners with a witch’s brew of international crises.

The discovery of hydrocarbons in the Exclusive Economic Zones of Cyprus and Israel has added a new strategic dimension to the region’s stability and security challenges. Turkey has objections to anything that might cause difficulties regarding what “rightfully” belongs to it—without much consideration of details like sovereign territorial waters and exclusive economic zones defined under international law. The Turkish attitude could transform offshore Cyprus into a probable theater of conflict involving all three potential EMP partners and keenly threatens NATO stability and cohesion.

At this preliminary stage, the EMP partners principal purposes should be to (a) shape a stable consensus on political and strategic objectives for peace and security in the Eastern Mediterranean (b) strengthen economic cooperation and create a platform of common interests vis-à-vis both adversaries and friends, (c) enhance cooperative common security policies to face the litany of troubles besetting the region, and (d) promote democratic values in the region as the antidote to authoritarianism, violence, and religious tribalism. The potential EMP partners are established democracies:

Greece and Cyprus, as EU members, operate under the European acquis and its firm democratic principles; and Israel is the only true parliamentary democracy in the Middle East. These shared democratic foundations offer a future EMP the key political and moral advantage vis-à-vis the authoritarian regimes populating the region and the potential of becoming a force for positive regional change.

All three potential EMP partners have adverse experiences with international security organizations, principally the UN and NATO. Israel faces challenges with a UN dominated by a majority Third World membership that often sides with its adversaries.<sup>1</sup> The recent resurgence of Palestinian agitation and attempts to compromise Israel’s border security by mass “peaceful” intrusion, against the backdrop of the United States moving the American embassy to Jerusalem, demonstrated yet again the intense hostility of many countries toward Israel, which is not expected to abate any time soon, if ever.<sup>2</sup> Greece has been on the receiving end of NATO’s embarrassing hands-off disregard of Turkey’s nonstop sabre rattling and threats of war in the Aegean, which have steadily increased, beginning in the 1980s, and have now reached a crescendo under President Erdogan. Cyprus has seen no positive effect whatsoever from repeated symbolic UN Security Council resolutions regarding the 1974 Turkish military intervention. As for the EU, which remains locked in its own eternal and, as of yet, unsuccessful debate to create a “common” foreign and security policy, it has little, if any, “pull” when it comes to festering crises like the Israel-Arab dispute, the Turkish occupation of nearly half of Cyprus, and Syria’s disintegration into chaos with the eager assistance of Russia, Iran, Turkey and their proxies including the mindboggling mix of Bashar al Assad’s dictatorship and Islamist fanatical terrorist factions.

The public cooperative narrative pursued by the potential EMP partners revolves around a strong sense of common interests and shared concerns. A recent summit meeting announced the determination of the negotiating parties “to push ahead with plans for a pipeline that would supply east Mediterranean gas to Europe as the continent seeks

- 1 See, for example, “UN approves Palestinian rights NGO that Israel says is linked to Hamas,” *The Jerusalem Post*, July 21, 2015, <https://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/UN-approves-Palestinian-rights-NGO-that-Israel-says-is-linked-to-Hamas-409649>
- 2 Khaled Abu Toameh, “US blocks UN resolution condemning Israel for deaths in Gaza clashes,” *The Times of Israel*, April 1, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/us-blocks-un-resolution-condemning-israel-for-deaths-in-gaza-clashes/>





to diversify its supplies.<sup>3</sup> But, as in all coalition projects, the EMP has its own “hidden” aspects. The most important of these “hidden” sides, and a cause for concern from the point of view of Greece and Cyprus, is the possibility of a renewed rapprochement between Ankara and Jerusalem.

Outwardly, diplomatic relations between Israel and Turkey are at a nadir but have not apparently touched Turkey and Israel’s entrenched trade ties.<sup>4</sup> Israeli analysts are careful not to dismiss a potential rearming of relations with Turkey despite the challenges. On the other hand, Turkey’s ultra-nationalist neo-Ottoman turn paired with escalating fundamentalist Islamism; Ankara’s clearly hegemonic moves in the Eastern Mediterranean and its repeated but unsuccessful attempts to gain the ascendancy as the “spiritual leader” of Arab social and political agitation; and its current uncertain convergence with Moscow should give pause to anyone outside the world of “rogue states” thinking Ankara can be a reliable long-term partner interested in stability and security now and in the future.

Greece and Cyprus see Turkey through negative lenses. Ankara’s claims of “great regional power” status with the “obvious right” to meddle in the affairs of its neighbors with impunity; a state without truly developed democratic institutions was accepted as a Muslim “secular republic” by the West, something that overlooks Turkey’s very recent genocidal past, and ignores its expansionist present, for questionable and, often, simplistic “geostrategic reasons;” a country that routinely breaches international norms and calls for the revision of international treaties;<sup>5</sup> a country with constant demands for special favors without offering anything in return; and a country comfortable with open threats upon the territorial integrity and sovereignty of its neighbors, a tendency which has been already translated into action through the 1974 invasion of Cyprus and, more recently, military interventionism in Syria.

Greece and Cyprus, fearing the worst and eager to appease in the absence of credible military deterrence, made the strategic mistake of believing that luring Turkey into the EU would be the best defense and long-term insurance against Ankara’s grandiose imperialistic plans. Such notions have suffered in recent years as Erdogan has moved away

from being a “European conservative democratic leader,” who quickly neutralized the army guardians of the Kemalist secular tradition to introduce Islam as Turkey’s resurgent political and social narrative. Even those supporting the Turkish EU bid among the Europeans have grown weary of Turkey’s non-stop taunting and Erdogan’s open threats to European stability best demonstrated by the blatant use of illegal (Muslim) immigration as a Weapon of Mass Destruction aiming primarily at Greece and, by extension, at all “infidel” European countries. Turkey’s EU candidate status is now riding dead in water and, by all indications, won’t be revived any time soon, if ever.<sup>6</sup>

## Greece: A Brewing Institutional Crisis

The modern history of Greece is an almost continuous succession of life-threatening domestic and foreign crises. Created an independent kingdom by the Great Powers in 1832, after more than four centuries of Ottoman subjugation, Greece experienced from the outset political instability, partisan conflict, and relentless foreign interference in its affairs. Since independence, Greece has endured two world wars, a national disaster in Asia Minor 1919-22, brutal Nazi occupation, a catastrophic communist insurrection 1946-49, and, more recently, a 7-year long military dictatorship that caused the 1974 Turkish invasion of Cyprus.

It is thus no wonder Greek politicians, and the Greek public in general, are imbued with fears of the next disaster waiting to happen. Indeed, “the mother of all disasters” did strike in 2010, when Greece went bankrupt and was hastily and disastrously tethered to a “bailout” scheme, concocted by the EU and the IMF, with the (unstated) aim of rescuing European banks holding significant portfolios of Greek debt. The net result of the “bailout” saga was yet another calamity which has brought Greece under permanent EU “monitoring” drastically reducing its sovereignty and imposing the kind of fiscal “discipline” that almost guarantees economic stagnation and turbulence well into the future.<sup>7</sup>

These events have had a predictable impact on already weak state institutions. The post-junta period, beginning in 1974, reinstated the old political establishment that had been frozen by the putschists. These discredited politicians were back in place only hours after the junta collapsed. A further key aggravating post-1974 event was the emergence of the PASOK populist-authoritarian socialist party led by a radical Trotskyist

3 Eran Bar-Tal *et.al.*, “Israel, Cyprus, Greece push East Med gas pipeline to Europe,” *Israel Hayom*, May 9, 2018, <http://www.israelhayom.com/2018/05/09/israel-cyprus-greece-push-east-med-gas-pipeline-to-europe/>

4 Sharon Udasin, “Turkish industrial leaders call for trade increase with Israel,” *The Jerusalem Post*, May 16, 2017, <http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Politics-And-Diplomacy/Turkish-industrial-leaders-call-for-trade-increase-with-Israel-490952> Joseph Dana, “Turkey and Israel’s deep trade ties expose the emptiness of Erdogan’s rhetoric over Jerusalem,” *The National*, December 21, 2017, <https://www.thenational.ae/opinion/comment/turkey-and-israel-s-deep-trade-ties-expose-the-emptiness-of-erdogan-s-rhetoric-over-jerusalem-1.689532>

5 Erdogan’s disastrous visit to Greece in December 2017 provides the best recent example; see, Helena Smith, “Confrontational Erdogan stuns Greek hosts on Athens visit,” *The Guardian*, December 7, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/07/turkish-president-erdogan-to-make-landmark-visit-to-greece>

6 The burial of the Turkish EU bid has mobilized “reformist” Turks eager to warn about the grave consequences of such an event; see, for example, a rather obvious attempt to advertise the significance of Europe keeping Turkey close to her bosom in Onur Bulbul, “Free trade pact would break EU-Turkey deadlock,” *EUobserver*, January 26, 2018, <https://euobserver.com/opinion/140684>

7 Matthew Karnitschnig, “Why Greece is Germany’s ‘de facto colony,’” *Politico*, June 14, 2017, <https://www.politico.eu/article/why-greece-is-germanys-de-facto-colony/> and Yanis Varoufakis, “How Europe’s Band-Aid Ensures Greece’s Bondage,” *Project Syndicate*, February 26, 2018, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/greece-debt-relief-enhanced-surveillance-by-yanis-varoufakis-2018-02>



firebrand economic professor, Andreas Papandreou. With PASOK at the helm for twenty years, with only a brief break of a conservative government during 1991-93, Greece's revived parliamentary rule suffered a crisis of confidence. The longer-term effects of this transition from dictatorship to supposed parliamentary democracy included the undermining of the rule of law, the rise of a terrorist-anarchical movement which continues besetting the country even today, and the subjugation of the Greek economy to a gargantuan public sector exploiting the state as a cash cow.

Eight years of suffering and sacrifice have imposed an unprecedented burden on the Greek people yet, as *Frankfurter Allgemeine* posited, did little to change the Greek government practice of Orwellian "doublethink" or the proclivity for using the public sector to satisfy clientelist demands.<sup>8</sup> The practice of *bahşiş* (the Turkish word meaning 'tip' or payment under the table) inherited from Ottoman times, still remains one of the preferred methods of last resort to oil the innards of the notoriously ossified Greek bureaucracy and promote one's business with the government. It is an accepted fact that public servants in general are susceptible to "unofficial persuasion," somethings that has prompted international calls for Greece to intensify its anti-corruption efforts<sup>9</sup> without though much affect as of this writing.

The rise to power in January 2015 of an unlikely coalition, comprising the radical Left party of SYRIZA and the extreme nationalist right-wing ANEL groupuscule, has aggravated an already intractable politico-economic and social crisis. SYRIZA, an extremist party that languished on the parliamentary margins commanding anemic election returns, was suddenly catapulted by popular anger and fear to the driver's seat without a clue of how to govern, let alone guide a country on the verge of economic disintegration. The SYRIZA-ANEL coalition, commonly referred to as "Syranel," has gone through various internal stresses without any immediate adverse effect. Currently (October 2018) however, an attempt to settle the so-called "name issue," concerning the official name of the neighboring Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), has rocked the coalition causing foreign minister Kotsias to resign and thus threatening Syranel's cohesion.<sup>10</sup> If

nothing else, the "name issue" demonstrated Syranel's deep ideological divisions kept under control only by the shared desire to maintain power.

The Syranel effect has been a negative on top of many destabilizing other negatives. Former Euro Working Group chief Thomas Wieser, for example, estimated the first six months of the Syranel government cost Greece 200 billion euros as SYRIZA-ANEL mindlessly sparred with an angry and disparaging EU council—and Wieser's estimate, reports suggested, was "safe" and "conservative."<sup>11</sup> Browbeaten by Berlin and the creditors, after this brief period of ill-advised bravado and cockiness, PM Alexis Tsipras was forced to disgracefully somersault and sign yet another unbearable austerity program dictated by Germany, and a bloc of conservative Northern Europeans, advised by the IMF. This politico-economic pogrom, "... was neither sustainable for Greece nor did it deliver stability for the eurozone. Its ultimate rationale, dictated by political convenience, was to give Northern Europe [yet another] roundabout bank bailout."<sup>12</sup>

SYRIZA's anarchist protest street culture, tainted further by strong sympathies toward criminal "urban activist warriors" and their terroristic low intensity war, creates a climate reminiscent of Germany of the 1920s. "Weimar Greece" is now a term gaining traction in debates on what is to be done with "united" Europe's most tormented partner. More ominously, SYRIZA's current political maneuvering suggests it has intentions of installing itself in the role of Greece's political "kingmaker" even if it is booted out of power (as it will, most likely, in the next election).<sup>13</sup>

Change of government won't immediately resolve the perennial Greek political crisis. The politicians—both in and out of parliament—have precious few answers on how to tame a hydrocephalous lumbering public sector, permanent home of militant obstructive labor unions siphoning off precious budget resources to satisfy their membership; an economy beset by statism's insatiable appetite, lack of investment, and low productivity; a weak private sector now besieged by the collapse of consumption and brutal taxation; stubborn unemployment; a frightening "brain drain" as younger educated people leave the country in droves to seek their fortunes elsewhere; and a generalized anomy that poisons daily life and undermines voter confidence to political pluralism. Indeed, one of the most infamous results of the "bailout," and the chaos and suffering it engendered, was the rapid rise of the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party and

8 "Kafka kai Orwell sti chora tou SYRIZA" (in Greek from *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*) *Kathimerini*, April 17, 2018, <http://www.kathimerini.gr/959439/opinion/epikairothta/politikh/kafka-kai-orgovel-sth-xwra-toy-syriza> also Kerin Hope and Jim Brunsten, "What the crisis changed in Greece — and what it did not," *Financial Times*, August 8 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/bddd58e6-995b-11e8-ab77-f854c65a4465>

9 "Council of Europe urges Greece to step up anti-corruption efforts," *ekathimerini.com*, March 1, 2018, <http://www.ekathimerini.com/226297/article/ekathimerini/news/council-of-europe-urges-greece-to-step-up-anti-corruption-efforts> Anagnostopoulos Criminal Law & Litigation, "Anti-Corruption and Bribery in Greece," September 25, 2018, <https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=c32820e8-a160-4196-92f2-fbd61e019c61>

10 Nicholas Paphitis and Elena Becatoros, "Greek foreign minister resigns over Macedonia deal dispute," *The Washington Post*, October 17, 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/greek-foreign-minister-resigns-prime-minister-takes-over/2018/10/17/558568fe-d20b-11e8-a4db-184311d27129\\_story.html?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.3e2a85bace52](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/greek-foreign-minister-resigns-prime-minister-takes-over/2018/10/17/558568fe-d20b-11e8-a4db-184311d27129_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.3e2a85bace52)

11 Dina Kiriakidou, "Special Report: The man who cost Greece billions," *Reuters*, July 20, 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eurozone-greece-tsipras-special-repor/special-report-the-man-who-cost-greece-billions-idUSKCN0PU0RU20150720>

12 Adam Tooze, "A Modern Greek Tragedy," *The New York Review of Books*, March 8, 2018, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2018/03/08/yanis-varoufakis-modern-greek-tragedy/>

13 Tassos Symeonides, "The Lernean Hydra," *Research Institute of European & American Studies*, March 19, 2018, <http://www.rieas.gr/images/editorial/hydra81.pdf>



its comfortable entry into parliament, where it now forms the third largest sitting party.<sup>14</sup>

Greek democracy confronts problems that won't be defeated easily any time soon. To begin with, Greek politicians face an uphill battle in reaching consensus on what needs to be done to strengthen liberal democracy and promote the stability required for economic recovery. Age-old practices, like family factionalism and party clientelism, need to be tamed. The organization of political parties, still centered on a "charismatic leader" practically acting as the source of all wisdom, needs to develop toward stronger internal democracy and decision-making by consensus rather than via the leader's personal choices. Electoral legislation should be reworked away from simple proportional representation that almost guarantees weak coalition governments and the attendant extended periods of political uncertainty.

Furthermore, Greek politicians must realize the country faces a strategic crisis of stability because of illegal immigration. Outwardly, almost all political parties act as if this festering crisis could be contained by EU initiatives and Greek democracy allowed to proceed by ignoring the problem. But this is hardly the time to bury one's head in the sand. Europe is literally splintering along the lines of resurgent nationalism and rejection of the EU model of "deepening" the union as the method of curing all trouble. Confrontation between member states and Brussels is developing fast following political developments in Italy and the former Eastern Bloc, which are now EU member states. Greek democracy cannot ignore the burgeoning implications of increasing illegal immigration pressure. Consensus on how to actively protect the country's borders, and thus minimize domestic political crises and conflicts due to the spread of the uninvited, should be the top priority for Greek leaders.

## Greece: EMP and Political Reform & Stability

From the Greek political perspective, the EMP initiative is indispensable. Greece's sovereign debt crisis and its bankruptcy in 2010 put its relationship with the northern EU members under severe strain. At present, Athens faces the unpalatable prospect of long-term foreign fiscal "monitoring" and significant limitations placed upon its economic policies. Because present and future Greek governments must function while in the vise of EU constant auditing, Athens seeks to promote alternative bilateral and multilateral initiatives outside the narrow Brussels-dominated space—and the EMP fits this bill perfectly. Any further initiative in this direction, however, will require sensitive diplomatic management and realistic estimates of regional risks vs. benefits.

Greece will need to coordinate and communicate not only with its European partners but, also, with the United States—especially in view of increasing American interest for expanded

defense cooperation with Greece.<sup>15</sup> This development is the perfect opportunity for further strengthening US-Greece relations after a prolonged period when vociferous anti-Americanism often commanded the order of the day. At the same time, Athens will have to balance such expanded relations with the American ally vis-à-vis its traditional friendly attitude toward Moscow. With Russia currently pursuing an expanded presence in the Mediterranean and assuming the key politico-strategic role in Syria, Greece has every reason to strive for a stable diplomatic relations with Moscow.

Participating in a future EMP should result in significant benefits for the ongoing efforts to reform political and administrative structures. Polling suggests Syriza will most likely lose the next general election, whenever it occurs, and bring to power the main opposition New Democracy (ND) party.<sup>16</sup> Kyriakos Mitsotakis, the ND president, is a strong Europeanist and multilateralist and should be expected to promote Greece's role in a potential EMP with vigor. Mitsotakis, a US-educated senior financial executive, and a "sworn reformist" who "slams nepotism and corruption,"<sup>17</sup> has repeatedly expressed the need for modernizing and streamlining government structures by introducing modern administrative and organizational methods—and the EMP project will undoubtedly add strong impetus to this effort. However, the ND president will face the same uphill struggle past reformers confronted when they attempted even minor adjustments.

## Greece: The Strategic Security Test

Greece, along with Cyprus, faces continuous challenges from Turkey. Greek politicians, irrespective of political persuasion, concluded early on that a policy of "convergence" and "Europeanization" was the best method for dealing with these trials. At present, shifts in Turkish politics, and the neutralization of the Turkish military as the country's main political force, present the need for reworked approaches to Turkey's continuing demands. But even in the hypothetical case of Turkey continuing without an aspiring sultan, *Erdoganism has succeeded to upend Turkish politics to such a degree that any successor regime could be of equal, or worse, radical and aggressive mind*. Simply put, Turkey has already moved far enough from the West to cause arguments like the following:<sup>18</sup>

Americans and Europeans must therefore ask themselves: How long before the same country that recently shot

14 Yannis Baboulias, "The Far Right Is a Growing Threat in Greece," *The Nation*, February 15, 2018, <https://www.thenation.com/article/the-far-right-is-a-growing-threat-in-greece/>.

15 "Defense cooperation between US and Greece expanding," *ekathimerini*, September 12, 2018, <http://www.ekathimerini.com/232554/article/ekathimerini/news/defense-cooperation-between-us-and-greece-expanding>

16 Tassos Koikkinidis, "Opposition Maintains Double Digit Lead Over SYRIZA in New Poll," *Greek Reporter*, October 19, 2018, <https://greece.greekreporter.com/2018/10/19/opposition-maintains-double-digit-lead-over-syriza-in-new-poll/>

17 Nikolas Leontopoulos, "The overlooked past of the 'next PM of Greece,'" *euobserver*, January 4, 2018, <https://euobserver.com/opinion/140388>

18 See, for example, Simon A. Waldman, "There's No Point in Europe Trying Again With Turkey. It Just Can't Compete With Putin," *Haaretz*, March 25, 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/premium-europe-is-trying-again-with-turkey-but-it-can-t-compete-with-putin-1.5938731>





down a Russian MIG moves on to sink a Greek or Cypriot ship? How long before incitement within Turkey brings on the assassination of an American ambassador, like the Russian one killed by a nationalist-Islamist police officer in 2016? How long before Turkish support for various jihadi groups creates the next “Islamic State” menace? How long before another neighboring country sees a Turkish military incursion, perhaps codenamed “White Dove” to match the current “Operation Olive Branch in Syria?”<sup>19</sup>

In light of this rapidly changing Turkey, Greece must make critical choices:

1. Greek politicians need to comprehend that long-term Turkish objectives aim at conquering Greek territories to “re-Turkify” space once in Ottoman possession.
2. Greek politicians need to recognize the disastrous effects of appeasement and Turkophobia.
3. Greek politicians must comprehend international law is far from being a death blow weapon against Turkish expansionism and aggression.
4. Greek politicians, above all, must urgently begin rebuilding and rearming the Greek defense forces at the prospect of a likely Turkish unprovoked attack or a so-called “hot episode” in the Aegean.

Greece has been reluctant over the years to counter the philo-Turkism of many of its “allies” and has been indecisive vis-à-vis Turkish territorial demands in the Aegean. It is a good question, for example, why Greece accepted to co-sign the so-called “Madrid Declaration” of July 8, 1997,<sup>20</sup> under prodding from then US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, legitimizing Turkish “vital interests” in the Aegean when these “vital interests” aim openly at injuring and nullifying Greek sovereignty. Another good question is why Greek governments since the invasion of Cyprus failed to demand **clarification of Article 5** of the NATO treaty in case of a Turkish attack—and what are the exact rights of Greece, under Article 5, to demand active NATO military support, including deployment of NATO forces, to defeat aggression by a supposed “ally.”

NATO practice over the years avoided scrupulously to criticize Turkey’s “no war, no peace” tactics in the Aegean with its nonstop violations of Greek sovereign air space and territorial waters. The impression such NATO behavior communicates to the Greek people is that Greek national security is less important, not to say of no consequence, when NATO tries to mollify Ankara, a fact fortified by the constant NATO admonitions to Athens to find “mutual solutions” with Turkey through “dialogue”—when, in practice, dialogue was, is, and continues to be a non-starter not only in Greek-Turkish relations but in Turkish relations with almost everybody else as well.

19 David Romano, “The West should prepare for the new Turkey,” *Rudaw*, March 11, 2018, <http://www.rudaw.net/english/opinion/11032018>

20 [Madrid Declaration] joint communique on Greek-Turkish relations, July 8th, 1997, <http://www.turkishgreek.org/kuetuephane/item/29-madrid-declaration-joint-communique-on-greek-turkish-relations-july-8th-1997>

More recently, however, the steadily rising invective from Turkey, and a Turkish patrol boat ramming a Hellenic Coastguard fast craft in the Imia islets vicinity, prompted NATO to announce it is ready “to do everything it can to make Turkey understand it cannot provoke its ally Greece and dispute its territorial integrity.”<sup>21</sup> This is a positive statement, although any Greek politician should be skeptical, in light of a long past, of any NATO statement claiming the alliance is truly prepared to do what needs to be done to make Ankara comprehensively “understand” it cannot constantly challenge its neighbors.

Greece’s predicament in the face of growing Turkish threats of war becomes even more complicated in light of the unpredictability of US attitudes toward Eastern Mediterranean security and the Aegean issues. So far, the Trump administration has no expressed strategic position on these matters despite decades of US strategic and political dominance in the area. It was Washington, for example, that intervened to avert war in 1996 during the Greek-Turkish “hot episode” Imia islets crisis—and it was Washington that prodded Greece to accept a return to the status quo ante which effectively strengthened Turkey’s Aegean grey zones stratagem, now very much a center part of Turkey’s “no war, no peace” offensive against Greece aimed to establish Turkish preponderance in the Archipelago.

Thus far, American intentions on how to deal with Turkey’s rapid disengagement from being “a bastion of the West” remain unclear. The sudden announcement by President Trump that the US will be withdrawing from Syria demonstrates exactly how a similar American *volte face* in the Aegean, even if it is not an imminent prospect, could stir immediate Turkish unpredictable reactions.<sup>22</sup> As for any EU “solidarity” expressions to Greece these will be limited, most certainly, to a renewed round of “stern” admonitions and calls to Ankara “to respect” Europe which Erdogan dismisses in the most hostile and threatening fashion.<sup>23</sup>

Overall, Greek politicians are confused, as usual, on how to approach the Turkish menace. In the absence of concrete deterrence capabilities, which could be deployed in a tit-for-tat with Ankara, Greek reactions to Turkish taunts are limited to issuing “firm warnings” about “red lines” that must not be crossed etc., which the Turks promptly dismiss and discard. Ultimately, Ankara’s perception of what Greece can and cannot do is saturated with a sense of overwhelming advantage. The only hope for this advantage to crack lies not with any “determined” Greek actions but, rather, with Ankara’s

21 “Kammenos receives NATO reassurances with regard to Turkey,” *ekathimerini.com*, February 15, 2018, <http://www.ekathimerini.com/225868/article/ekathimerini/news/kammenos-receives-nato-reassurances-with-regard-to-turkey>

22 “Trump’s Unscripted Syria Pullout Promise Has been Brewing for Weeks,” *Haaretz*, April 2, 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/trump-s-unscripted-syria-pullout-promise-has-been-brewing-for-weeks-1.5964026>

23 Ece Toksabay, Tuvan Gumrukcu, “Erdogan warns Europeans ‘will not walk safely’ if attitude persists, as row carries on,” *Reuters*, March 22, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-referendum-europe-idUSKBN16T13E>





ability to manage the increasing erosion of confidence in its relations with NATO and the West in general.

## Greece: EMP as a Regional Stability Platform

The discovery of hydrocarbons in Israeli and Cypriot waters has literally put a potential EMP on the map prompting analysts to speak of “Energy: The West’s Strategic Opportunity in the Eastern Mediterranean.”<sup>24</sup> The discovery furthermore has stimulated strong EU interest as Europe’s consumption of liquefied gas is expected to increase rapidly in the immediate future.<sup>25</sup> Given Turkey’s belligerent ramblings, and its recent naval drills and threats in Cypriot waters, the EMP, in Greek eyes, is a natural coalition of common interests arrayed against Turkish threats of war and the budding effort to build common defenses against Turkish belligerence.

However, Greece faces a delicate path vis-à-vis Israel but, also, Egypt, which wishes to converge with a future EMP. On the one hand, Greece continues a traditionally “pro-Arab” diplomacy but, on the other, it needs to clarify the nature of its political and security cooperation with Jerusalem and Cairo, both of which are involved in ongoing disputes in the Middle East which Greece looks to avoid. From the Greek perspective, attempting to balance Greece’s traditional pro-Arab inclinations with developing ties with Israel could be challenging: witness PM Tsipras’s caustic reaction to Israel’s defending its border against the massive Hamas-instigated Palestinian attempt to breach the frontier fence upon the anniversary of “Nakba” in May 2018.<sup>26</sup>

Stability through EMP, therefore, hinges on whether Greece can find common ground with Israel and Egypt which will be “disconnected,” to the extent possible, from the major Middle East flashpoints that are key security concerns for Jerusalem and Cairo. In the opposite case, a future EMP could be difficult to develop and manage, and, in the worst case, it may become dysfunctional.<sup>27</sup> A recent tripartite Greece-Cyprus-Egypt summit meeting in Nicosia was thus interpreted as Greece’s opening effort to strike common ground with Egypt and promote mutual cooperation under the related umbrella of “developing strategic relations” between Israel and Egypt with

US blessings. Presumably, the essence of this Greek initiative was to strike a balance of “neutrality” with Cairo on Middle East conflicts that are primarily “intra-Muslim” affairs involving deep-seated differences emerging from religious strain.

As for Greece vis-à-vis Turkey, Greece is often described as caught in the Thucydides Trap. The ancient Greek historian, in his opus on the Peloponnesian War, expressed a universal principle behind the cause of (any) war thus: “It was the rise of Athens and the fear that this instilled in Sparta that made war inevitable.” Although Turkey won’t exactly fill the role of a political and intellectual Athens of today, Ankara’s persistent verbal escalation, coupled with belligerent military displays, feeds the steadily expanding perception of imminent Turkish military aggression. And modern Greece, hardly a resurrection of Sparta resting on a strong militarized society, has chosen appeasement to ward off the Turkish threat and, thus, succeeds daily in sending the wrong signals to the Erdogan regime. But appeasement, as the attitude of Britain and France towards Nazi Germany between the world wars proved, is not **a guarantor of peace** but simply a delay before the inevitable violent clash. Sooner or later, Athens will be forced to reply to Ankara’s provocations.<sup>28</sup> When that happens, Greece will be in need of all the help from potential partners it can get:

Greece and Israel must join forces and present their cases to NATO and the EU, as they are critical to the geostrategic future of the region. In so doing, an effective network of diplomatic deterrence can be created that would promote peace and stability. Important though that step may be, it is not enough. After years of productive relations, now is the time when Greece and Israel must reinforce their cooperation by elevating it to a military Partnership.<sup>29</sup>

Athens and Jerusalem have already taken significant steps in military cooperation involving Cyprus and Egypt as well. The Israeli Air Force has conducted joint training with the Hellenic Air Force; Israeli pilots have trained with their counterparts from Greece, the US, Italy, and, significantly, the United Arab Emirates during multifaceted air drills conducted in Greek airspace; and land elements of the Israeli Defense Forces have trained in Cyprus and Crete.<sup>30</sup> These joint drills triggered the usual denunciations from Turkey but, also, from Israel’s Arab opponents. During the recent visit of Israeli President Reuven Rivlin to Athens it was reiterated that “Greece and Israel – with the participation of Cyprus – have agreed to

24 Seth Cropsey & Eric Brown, “Energy: The West’s Strategic Opportunity in the Eastern Mediterranean,” *Hudson Institute*, December 2014, [https://www.hudson.org/content/researchattachments/attachment/1443/2014\\_12\\_02\\_hudson\\_report\\_eastern\\_med\\_final\\_single\\_pages.pdf](https://www.hudson.org/content/researchattachments/attachment/1443/2014_12_02_hudson_report_eastern_med_final_single_pages.pdf)

25 Nikos Tsafos, “Europe Turns to Russia, and Elsewhere, to Meet Rising Gas DEMpnd in 2017,” Center for Strategic & International Studies, January 18, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/europe-turns-russia-and-elsewhere-meet-rising-gas-dEMPnd-2017>

26 “Tsipras intervention on Palestine and Iran during EU leadership dinner” (in Greek) *Kathimerini*, May 23, 2018, <http://www.kathimerini.gr/964597/article/epikairothta/politikh/paremvash-tsipra-gia-to-palaistiniako-kai-to-iran-sto-deipno-twn-hgetwn-ths-ee>

27 Vasilis Pantazopoulos, “On the quadruple cooperation Greece-Cyprus-Israel-Egypt,” *Liberal*, December 11, 2017 (in Greek), [http://www.liberal.gr/arthro/180849/amyna--diplomatia/2017/peri-tis-tetramerous-sunergasias-elladas--kuprou--israil-aiguptou.html#\\_ftn2](http://www.liberal.gr/arthro/180849/amyna--diplomatia/2017/peri-tis-tetramerous-sunergasias-elladas--kuprou--israil-aiguptou.html#_ftn2)

28 Emphasis added; Dr. Spyridon N. Litsas, “A Perilous Tango for Four in the Eastern Med,” *BESA*, March 11, 2018, <https://besacenter.org/perspectives-papers/perilous-tango-four-eastern-med/>

29 *Ibid.*

30 Judith Abramson, “Watch: Israeli Air Force in Greece for a joint exercise with US and Greece,” *Jerusalem On Line*, April 24, 2016, <http://www.jerusalemonline.com/news/politics-and-military/military/watch-israeli-air-force-in-greece-for-a-military-exercise-20645> Anna Ahronheim, “Israel pilots flying alongside pilots from the UAE in week-long Greek drill, The Jerusalem Post, March 28, 2017, <http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Israel-Air-Force-launches-joint-drill-exercises-with-Arab-Greek-forces-485391> Gabi Siboni, Gal Perl Finkel, “The IDF Exercises in Cyprus and Crete,” June 28, 2017, <http://www.inss.org.il/publication/idf-exercises-cyprus-crete/>



maintain and broaden “an arc of security and prosperity in the eastern Mediterranean”<sup>31</sup> and President Rivlin re-emphasized the significance of the Israel-Greece strategic relationship in no uncertain terms.

Predictably, the EMP convergence is stirring ultranationalist pro-Erdogan propagandists, who see (again) “a Zionist conspiracy” behind the developing Israel-Greece-Cyprus cooperation. The “conspiracy,” this line of “reasoning” claims, inevitably leads to war with NATO, the US, and their allies.<sup>32</sup> Pouring oil on the fire, a pro-Erdogan daily opined NATO plans to attack Turkey in 2018. This claim reenergized Turkey’s ultranationalists, who jumped at the opportunity to suggest that “It is an urgent necessity for Turkey to question NATO without losing time, discuss in detail its desires and targets. It is a fact that we are close to the line where we will have to say all-or-nothing.”<sup>33</sup>

## Greece: EMP Political and Strategic Approaches

Any multilateral effort toward an *Entente Cordiale* requires not only directing and deliberation organs but, also, agreement on organizational, political, and strategic objectives. In a classic definition of multilateralism, states intending to cooperate pursue a shared “...strategy... [that] may be used to compete against others who are excluded from the group, to put pressure on them, even to fight them.”<sup>34</sup> In the spirit of this definition, a potential EMP:

1. would compete with immediate regional and more distant actors in retaining control and secure exploitation of the region’s natural resources; and aims to extend this trilateral cooperation into relations with “satellite” areas that contain one or more international players seeking mutually profitable peaceful relations and cooperation;
2. would seek to push back against hostile actors and others seeking expansion and control into areas of vital interest to the three EMP partners;
3. should be prepared to militarily organize so that effective deterrence develops over time underpinned by joint defense plans, security arrangements/collaboration, and intelligence sharing;

31 George N. Tzogopoulos, “Whither Greece-Israel relations?” *The Jerusalem Post*, February 9, 2018, <https://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Whither-Greece-Israel-relations-542126>

32 “Pro-Erdogan columnist calls on Turks to get ready for war with NATO,” *Turkish Minute*, November 27, 2017, <https://www.turkishminute.com/2017/11/20/erdogan-columnist-calls-on-turks-to-get-ready-for-war-with-nato/>

33 “Erdogan daily: NATO plans to attack Turkey in 2018,” Stockholm Center for Freedom, November 19, 2017, <https://stockholmcf.org/erdogan-daily-nato-plans-to-attack-turkey-in-2018/>

34 William Zartman and Saadia Touval, “Introduction: return to the theories of cooperation” in *International Cooperation: The Extents and Limits of Multilateralism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 2. For a detailed analysis on the process of multilateralism see Robert O. Keohane, “Multilateralism: An Agenda for Research,” *International Journal*, 45, no. 4, (Autumn, 1990): 731-764.

4. and should strive to strengthen the democratic structures of the three potential EMP partners.

Given the commitment of the three potential EMP partners to democratic political and international fundamentals, the obvious EMP strategic orientation should be a strong relationship with the Western Partnership and, more particularly, with the US. As a recent analysis put it:<sup>35</sup>

U.S. foreign policy has the opportunity to use the solidifying ties with Greece, Cyprus, and Israel to take advantage of the strategic relationship that the three countries have established. A fundamental change in the region’s order has created the opportunity for tripartite regional ties to advance Washington’s interest in blunting Turkish and jihadist influence in the region.

All three EMP potential partners have already strong bonds with the US. Israel enjoys a diachronic special relationship with America. Greece is a member of NATO and a traditional US ally. And Cyprus enjoys productive and substantive cooperation with Washington. This existing multilateral substratum must be cultivated via a common approach emphasizing (a) political engagement at all levels and, particularly, focusing on US-Turkey relations; EMP must present a convincing assessment of how US strategic interests are damaged by the steady transformation of Turkey into a hostile Islamic power now pursuing a policy of “problems with all neighbors;”<sup>36</sup> and (b) an EMP must aim at systems of extraction and pipeline distribution to fit in with the EU’s rapidly increasing natural gas needs and its interest in reducing dependence on Russian natural gas exports. The key associated target in the energy sector must be planning for pipeline networks bypassing Turkey. While Turkey offers an economically sound pipeline solution, its rapid departure from the Western camp, and its joining fundamentalist Islamic partners, defeats any long-term thought of committing to a “Turkish solution” and thus augmenting Turkey’s capabilities of harassing and blackmailing its neighbors.

From the Greek perspective, solidifying strategic ties with Israel is (or, it should be) a no-brainer. Greece stands to benefit from close cooperation with Israel in every major segment of the economy and defense. Israel’s dynamic technology sector, pioneering agricultural methods, medical advances, robust defense forces, advanced military technologies and so much else could provide Greece with cutting-edge know-how and systems implementation. Israel, on the other hand, has a clear geopolitical and strategic reason to strengthen ties with Greece **and** Cyprus. Encircled by hostile neighbors,

35 Seth Cropsey, “U.S. Policy and the Strategic Relationship of Greece, Cyprus, and Israel: Power Shifts in the Eastern Mediterranean,” March 2015 Monograph, Hudson Institute, p. 6.

36 As opposed to “zero problems with neighbors,” an approach introduced by former Turkish foreign minister Ahmet Davutoglu, who was promoted prime minister and then defenestrated by Erdogan in 2016. Selim Can Sazak and Calgar Kurc, “From Zero Problems to Zero Friends? The Past, Present, and Future of Turkey’s Role in Regional Security Cooperation,” *The Century Foundation*, February 21, 2018, <https://tcf.org/content/report/zero-problems-zero-friends/>



and lacking strategic space depth, *Israel has only one open corridor to the north and Europe*—that of the Aegean Sea and Greek sovereign air and land space plus Cypriot sovereign airspace and sea lines of communication.

In his latest outburst, Erdogan, who has now taken to displaying the Rabiya, the hand salute of the Muslim Brotherhood, has appointed himself the leader of a pan Islamic campaign to oppose the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel by the US.<sup>37</sup> These are indicators Israel cannot ignore—now and well into the future. The continuing Turkish attempts to undermine and strangle the internationally recognized Republic of Cyprus should be of immediate concern to Israel as well: if Erdogan succeeds in making the Turkish Cypriot pseudo-state internationally recognized, Turkey will be controlling Cypriot affairs by political proxy and overt military power and, by extension, it will be *the* permanent menace to Israel's strategic corridor linking the Jewish state to the Aegean and Europe.

The core strategic component of an EMP is the East Med pipeline project. East Med is the only (relatively) safe choice for bringing natural gas from Israeli and Cypriot waters to Europe as it bypasses Turkey and thus defeat's Ankara's objective of using a pipeline as blackmail in its burgeoning clash with the West. The EU considers East Med an "extremely competitive" project and a final investment decision is expected in 2019.<sup>38</sup> East Med ties its three partners into a firm partnership that cannot be created with Turkish participation under any circumstances and/or conditions. Even if Erdogan's neo-sultanism disappears tomorrow, his legacy will continue to dominate a highly combustible domestic state pregnant with the lethal divisions engendered by religious fanaticism, sectarian violence, and the Kurdish struggle for self-determination.

At a time when American foreign policy remains fluid, without a discernible unified approach to the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East, Turkey needs to re-asses its position. NATO, as the conceptual bedrock of Turkey-West relations, is weakening rapidly thanks to Erdogan's obvious obsession with unilateralism, Islamism, and expansionism. The Turkish president "may even consider this [NATO] Partnership as a liability which keeps Turkey from acting unilaterally."<sup>39</sup> But Erdogan is not alone in rethinking his country's association with NATO and the West. An increasing number of Western voices call for drastic steps vis-à-vis Turkey including its

eventual expulsion from the alliance.<sup>40</sup> At the same time, strained EU-Turkey relations because of Syria and the illegal immigration crisis put to the test the perceived long "alliance" between Europe and Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>41</sup> And since Europe remains primarily focused on socio-political strains, like the economy and migration, it has had little interest in developing a comprehensive geopolitical strategy in the region.<sup>42</sup>

## Greece: EMP Core Geopolitics

There is nothing new in Turkey constantly questioning and protesting the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of both Greece and Cyprus. Turkey's constant aggressive interference to expand its own EEZ and browbeat the internationally recognized, and EU member, Republic of Cyprus, aims to drive away foreign companies, wishing to explore in Cypriot waters, by sending warships to threaten them and gradually create a wedge between Greek and Cypriot strategic spaces. Such Turkish actions have the unmistakable objective of further increasing Israel's geographic isolation within a strategic perimeter tightly controlled by Ankara.

Turkish tactics, however, must face a geopolitical space limited by the complexity of the Middle East conflict, the deep hostility separating Sunni and Shia, and the conflicting interests of dozens of external powers involved in the perpetual Syrian war, which are not pleased with Turkey's constant destabilizing interference and jockeying for position in Assad's country and, to a lesser degree, Iraq. Against this background it is no surprise "most of the gambles the AKP [Erdogan's political party] took, starting from the mid-2000s but especially from 2011 onwards, boomeranged."<sup>43</sup> One of Erdogan's biggest such flops was his fruitless fuming at Varna, Bulgaria where he was met by a frigid EU reception highlighting the rapidly developing divorce between Turkey and the prospect of EU membership.<sup>44</sup>

37 "Jerusalem 'red line' for all Muslims, President Erdoğan says," Daily Sabah, December 5, 2017, <https://www.dailysabah.com/diplomacy/2017/12/06/jerusalem-red-line-for-all-muslims-president-erdogan-says>

38 Ron Rouso, "Israel expects decision on East Med gas pipeline to Europe in 2019," *Reuters*, March 8, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ceraweek-energy-israel/israel-expects-decision-on-east-med-gas-pipeline-to-europe-in-2019-idUSKCN1GK2OI>

39 Huda al-Husseini, "The prospect of Turkish-Greek flare-up over Cyprus gas!" *Al Arabiya English*, March 2, 2018, <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/views/news/2018/03/02/The-prospect-of-Turkish-Greek-flare-up-over-Cyprus-gas-.html>

40 Michael Rubin, "It's time for Turkey and NATO to go their separate ways," *The Washington Post*, August 16, 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/democracy-post/wp/2018/08/16/its-time-for-turkey-and-nato-to-go-their-separate-ways/?utm\\_term=.c01d74ee8f6a](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/democracy-post/wp/2018/08/16/its-time-for-turkey-and-nato-to-go-their-separate-ways/?utm_term=.c01d74ee8f6a); Sinan Giddi, "The U.S. and Turkey Go Their Separate Ways," *Stratfor Worldview*, <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/us-and-turkey-go-their-separate-ways>, David Blair, "You thought Erdogan was bad before? The worst of Turkey's leader is yet to come," *The Telegraph*, July 16, 2016, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/2016/07/16/you-thought-erdogan-was-bad-before-the-worst-is-yet-to-come/>

41 Patrick Nopens, "Geopolitical Shifts in the Eastern Mediterranean," EGMOND Royal Institute for International Affairs, *Security Policy Brief*, No. 43, February 2013, p.2, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/148867415.pdf>

42 Ibid., p. 7.

43 "Turkey's forays into the Middle East," *International Crisis Group*, December 14, 2017, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/western-europemediterranean/turkey/turkeys-forays-middle-east>

44 Matthew Karnitschnig, "Europe fakes Turkish delight," *Politico*, March 27, 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/article/turkey-europe-erdogan-spoils-eus-bulgarian-party/>; M.K. Bhadrakumar, "The rise and fall of Turkey's Erdogan," *Asia Times*, November 23, 2017 <http://www.atimes.com/article/rise-fall-turkeys-erdogan/>





Potential EMP pipeline cooperation acquires added geopolitical and strategic value as the EU recently moved to expand defense cooperation of its members following Donald Trump's ascent to the presidency and his ambivalence toward traditional Euro-Atlantic security structures. The signing of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) treaty in November 2017 aims to consolidate European common defense as the US appears diminishing its traditional commitment to the European theater.<sup>45</sup> The Eastern Mediterranean thus could become the axis of a cooperation coalition to defend against attempts by anyone to disrupt peace, seek conquest through war, and pursue efforts to drive a wedge in the Aegean-Cyprus sea continuum. And Israel, by virtue of its outstanding defense preparedness and unparalleled experience in dealing with external aggression and Islamist terrorism, would rightfully become the leading EMP strategic partner.

From the purely Greek standpoint, the emerging EMP partnership is a unique opportunity to bring some positive energy in a diplomatic tradition imbued by the spirit of constant retreat before Turkish blackmail and the failure to promote firm collaborative relations with partners whose interests are also menaced by Turkey's revisionism and aggressive militarism.

The present situation offers a unique opportunity for profitable mutual commonalities: Turkey's increasing opposition to the US, Erdogan's constant vituperative sniping at both Europe and the US, Turkish interference in Syria presenting the real risk of a military clash between Turkish and American troops, and Ankara's developing idyll with Tehran combine to box Turkey in an unprecedented negative diplomatic space. Furthermore, Erdogan's politico-military maneuvering and inflammatory rhetoric is beginning to have an impact on yet another important diplomatic front: the power of traditional pro-Turkish lobbies, in both the American and European diplomatic establishments, is waning. This is capital Ankara loses without much hope of rebuilding it in the near future.

### Greece: EMP Future – Aims, Methods, Policies

There is little doubt about the commanding role of Israel in any future EMP. Jerusalem's long and varied experience with building strategic agreements and adjusting to changing international trends is well established. This flexibility is closely associated with Israel's deterrence power vis-à-vis its Arab adversaries and its ability to bargain from a position of strength. Israel, therefore, forms the main pivot upon which an EMP can built firm institutional, strategic, and political state-to-state relationships.

<sup>45</sup> "Security and defence cooperation: EU will enhance its capacity to act as a security provider, its strategic autonomy, and its ability to cooperate with partners," *European Council, Council of the European Union*, June 26, 2018, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2018/06/25/security-and-defence-cooperation-eu-will-enhance-its-capacity-to-act-as-a-security-provider-its-strategic-autonomy-and-its-ability-to-cooperate-with-partners/>

Greek political forces, with the exception of the Stalinist Communist Party of Greece and the disparate rogue SYRIZA core elements, are all committed to expanding strategic and economic ties with Jerusalem. In a comparative perspective the Greek predicament, but also that of Cyprus, resembles closely Israel's security dilemma: all three countries face sworn enemies bent on seeking their reduction through constant diplomatic challenges, blackmail, intimidation, and war and, in the case of Israel, its physical extermination.

Erdogan's victory in the June 24, 2018 general election has given him a free hand to continue with his present policies accelerating Turkey's transition from secular Kemalism to a conservative Islamic regime. With his hands now untied, Erdogan will continue pushing the boundary toward eventual conflictual "solutions" as his most recent pronouncements of what Turkey is prepared to do in the Eastern Mediterranean reveal.<sup>46</sup>

Developing an EMP will require focused and coordinated initiatives. While summitry is welcome as the platform for reaching guiding principles, a future EMP should acquire standing administrative and consultation structures as soon as possible. These structures, in the form perhaps of a tripartite general council or secretariat, would be responsible for forming specific policy proposals, organizing the exchange of information between the partners, pursuing the necessary contacts with outside interested parties, like the EU and potential investors, and maintaining open diplomatic channels with other regional and international actors which may grow into EMP associates. Here, Athens and Nicosia can contribute decisively thanks to their EU membership and their regular channels of communication with Brussels and the EU's "central powers."

EMP's integrity and ability to strengthen the bonds of its potential members will largely depend on whether the three future partners succeed in formulating a common position on the Cyprus question. This position should not accept any "debate" on the international standing of the Republic of Cyprus along the lines Turkey has pursued since 1974. Thus, anything resembling the ill-fated Annan Plan of old should be rejected if an EMP is to maintain control of extraction and distribution of its energy resources without constant Turkish interference, sabotage, and military bullying. In this respect, Israel is (or should be) well aware of how Turkey manipulates proposals of international "settlements" in its diplomacy. The Palestinian issue, for instance, is an instructive example of such Turkish tactics—fervently supporting Palestinian emancipation is part of manipulating Islamist terror groups, like Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood, whose anti-Jewish hate preaching remains a key of a Turkish-instigated international Muslim campaign to isolate and reduce the Jewish state.

<sup>46</sup> "Erdogan says Turkey will take 'necessary measures' in east Med, if needed," *ekathimerini*, October 20, 2018, <http://www.ekathimerini.com/233871/article/ekathimerini/news/erdogan-says-turkey-will-take-necessary-measures-in-east-med-if-needed>.





## Conclusion

A future EMP should focus on creating a solid coalition offering economic benefits and long-term security to its members. Turkey's hostility toward the tripartite initiative, and Ankara's efforts to defeat it, emanates from fear that such a coalition, by all indications, is already in the making and contacts of its potential partners are converging upon a common plan for action. This fact interferes directly with Turkey's stated objective to control the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean waters surrounding Cyprus and washing the shores of Israel. Ankara's permanent installation in Cyprus by way of a bi-zonal federated "independent" Turkish Cypriot state, in which Turkey will be the controller of the northern part of the island and a permanent military menace to the Greek Cypriots, would be a disaster for peace in the region and it should be strenuously opposed. If there is one factor cast in stone underlying Turkish behavior, it is Ankara's single-minded strategy of trying to torment and exhaust its neighbors into submission in its quest to be recognized as the dominant regional power with the "right" to shape regional strategic priorities according to its own perceptions of security. An example of Turkey's disposition and such "friendly" attitudes is allowing the terrorist Hamas's military wing to operate an office in Istanbul to promote Hamas strategies.<sup>47</sup> Turkey also chose to ally with Russia and Iran for the purpose of "settling" the Syrian conflict to the satisfaction of the three allied parties and shape a post-war Syria according to the whims of Ankara, Moscow, and Tehran.<sup>48</sup>

Moving forward, therefore, must begin with the assumption that there can be no lasting agreement with Turkey, now or in the future, on any of the potential common EMP objectives. And those who still claim (in Greece and Israel) that compromise on the Cyprus issue is possible should review again the failed attempt of re-unifying the island at the Swiss resort of Crans Montana in 2017 and examine the reasons for this failure. Turkey insisted on permanent Turkish military presence in Northern Cyprus; Turkey's right to intervene in Cypriot affairs in case of "threats" to Turkish interests was emphatically stated; and the "rebirth" of Cyprus via scrapping the internationally recognized Republic of Cyprus and replacing it with a loose and unstable confederation of two ethnically divided and autonomous entities was Turkey's preferred "solution." With such "reunification" proposals on the table, few should be surprised this latest effort collapsed.<sup>49</sup>

In the broader scheme of Western security, a future EMP would carry solid advantages in meeting the challenges

47 Ben Menachem, "Turkey Embraces Hamas," *Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs*, February 22, 2018, <http://jcpa.org/turkey-embraces-hamas/>

48 Andrew Malcom, "While we were sleeping, Russia, Iran and Turkey made an ominous deal," *Twin Cities Pioneer Press*, April 12, 2018, <https://www.twincities.com/2018/04/12/andrew-malcolm-while-we-were-sleeping-russia-iran-and-turkey-made-an-ominous-deal/>

49 Van Coufoudakis, "Cyprus: The Crans-Montana Deadlock and the Next Steps," *Defend Democracy Press*, March 23, 2018, <http://www.defenddemocracy.press/cyprus-the-crans-montana-deadlock-and-the-next-steps/>

of constant instability and conflict. The Syrian catastrophe has upended all traditional "peacemaking" schemes for the region and is radically redefining Israel's security strategies, especially vis-à-vis Iran. Tehran's fundamentalist theocrats openly threaten Israel with long-range missile attacks, while Russia, emboldened by Western misapplication and confusion over Syria, has now re-established its firm presence in the region along with a military projection capability.

The United States, NATO, and (the perennially vacillating) EU must coordinate to reassert not only their regional presence but, also, their determination to frustrate any attempts of the adventurist Russia-Iran-Turkey axis to foment instability and war in the region with the strategic aim of redrawing the strategic map. In this context, the recent American expression of support, offered to Cypriot President Anastasiades by Washington on hydrocarbon exploration and extraction, is a positive signal that should not be ignored.<sup>50</sup> And with the EU embarking on creating its own military arm, in the form of a "Euro Army," Greece and Cyprus are further upgraded as Western strategic outposts in the region. Souda Bay in Crete and bases in Cyprus become ever more strategically and operationally important Western defense preparedness installations ready to support strategic stability initiatives in both the Middle East and North Africa and, also, buttress the defense of Israel.

The future EMP should not ignore the increasing Western political and strategic discomfort over Turkey's calling for treating Turkey as it "deserves," given Erdogan's outright rejection of Western values, his fundamentalist theocratic proclivities, and his aggressive expansionist policy narrative. One key future EMP political policy should be confronting and challenging Western "pragmatists," who equate the "loss" of Turkey with a claimed devastating defeat of Western interests.<sup>51</sup> These "pragmatists" fail to see that with the collapse of the USSR the old logic of Turkey as the "rampart" of the West on the Asian rim has also collapsed. With Erdogan confirming, with every passing day, his rejection and condemnation of Western values, his not-too-subtle hate for the Jewish state, and his elevation of fanatical Islamism as the driving force behind the neo-Ottoman Türkiye, there is little room for compromise with Turkey's emerging Islamic republic.

The "pragmatists" unrealistically insist Ankara, even at this advanced stage of Turkey's sinking in its Islamist morass,

50 "US Backs Cyprus Over Turkish Warships Energy Blockade," *National Herald*, February 22, 2018, <https://www.thenationalherald.com/191438/us-backs-cyprus-turkish-warships-energy-blockade/> The US is also moving to repeal the arms embargo it imposed on the Republic of Cyprus in 1987; "US senator introduces bill to end arms embargo on Cyprus," *Cyprus Mail Online*, May 25, 2018, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2018/05/25/us-senator-introduces-bill-to-end-arms-embargo-on-cyprus/>

51 Michael Singh, James F. Jeffrey, "The U.S. Partnership With Turkey Is Worth Preserving," *Foreign Policy*, March 18, 2018, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2018/03/19/the-u-s-partnership-with-turkey-is-worth-preserving/> Predictably, Turkish commentary stresses Turkey's grievances against the West with Europe, in particular, "closed the door in [Turkey's] face," Barçın Yınanç, "Who is losing Turkey?" *Hurriyet Daily News*, November 17, 2017, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/opinion/barcin-yinanc/who-is-losing-turkey-122742>



may be “rehabilitated” if given incentives. Of course, the “pragmatists” forget that it was this supposed logic of incentives which fed Turkish irredentism and Ankara’s illegal and anti-coalition behavior. NATO, dominated by this “logic,” continues to tolerate (if not accept) the grotesque display of NATO member Turkey openly threatening military action in the Aegean over grandiose and aggressive territorial claims. Indeed, this pro-Turkish “pragmatism” is reminiscent of the similar obsession with the Shah’s Iran, which was also deemed a bastion of “stability” (and oil security) in a turbulent region. The collapse of this Iran “bastion” into the hands of the Khomeini mullahs did create a permanent menace with which the West, however, learned how to co-exist in the absence of any other choice. Turkey, as the emerging Eastern Mediterranean “Iran,” should be treated no differently.

In the final analysis, it is not the future EMP’s purpose to resolve the issue of Turkey as the current thorniest security problem for the Western Partnership in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. The EMP’s core mission will be ***to promote and secure the collective interests of its partners, to promote the primacy of international law over irredentist and aggressive policies irrespective of their source, and to create and strengthen a superstructure of economic initiatives of irrefutable strategic value to Europe and the United States.*** In the meantime, “Europe and NATO cannot afford to be checkmated by Erdogan.”<sup>52</sup>

<sup>52</sup> “Judy Asks: Is Turkey Weakening NATO?” *Carnegie Europe: Judy Dempsey’s Strategic Europe*, September 20, 2017, <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategiceurope/73174>





# Advancing Democracy in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: An Israeli Perspective

Ehud Eiran

## Introduction

The following chapter makes the case for the further development of the emerging Greek-Israeli-Cypriote quasi-alliance<sup>1</sup> in a direction that will buttress liberal-democracy in all three allies from an Israeli perspective. The chapter aims at strengthening the Israel-Cyprus-Greece alliance, and adding shared values to its formation, as well as possibilities to extend it. For the purposes of this paper, I define liberal democracy as a type of government in which the source of legitimacy is the general population. Individuals enjoy universal suffrage, and equal decision – making power, secured mostly through elected and accountable representatives. Elections are free and are held regularly. All decision-making processes are subject to the rule of law, and are constrained by a constitution, basic laws, or constitutional case law. These constitutional constraints protect basic freedoms and rights of individuals and minority groups.<sup>2</sup> Such a democracy is supported by a democratic culture including a vibrant civil society, and media outlets that are free and serve as another de-facto check on the government.

This chapter analyzes the specific challenges for democracy in Israel. I then offer specific ideas of how the quasi-alliance can contribute not only to the three nations' security, but also to their democratic fabric and their rule of law. Specifically, the chapter recommends that the material aspects of the alliance be directed also towards answering some of the insecurities that fuel populism and anti-democratic sentiments: financial insecurity, physical insecurity and identity-related insecurity. It further suggests that the three allies complement the power-based considerations that drive the alliance now, by adding a normative layer with a commitment to liberal-democracy. The chapter then offers some concrete policy recommendations for achieving these goals. Beyond energy and geo-politics, Greece, Israel and Cyprus are also bound by the fact that they are the only democracies in a region that is generally authoritarian.

## The Strengths of Israel's Democracy

In an era when liberal democracy is under strain on a global scale, Israel boasts a thriving democracy, with a 79/100 mark

in the freedom rankings by Freedom House.<sup>3</sup> More specific indices that look at issues such as accountability, quality of governance, and rights and liberties, place Israel generally higher than most countries in the world, though mid-low compared to OECD countries.

Elections are free and regular. Only twice in the nation's history were elections postponed, due to the 1948 and 1973 wars. In both cases the delay was only of a few months. The state has a strong independent judiciary including a Supreme Court that created de-facto liberal-democracy through its rulings. Moreover, the court has a strong check on all activities of government agencies through the unique procedure of *Bagatz*, (an Acronym for the High Court of Justice) that allows petitions to the court, challenging administrative actions of all state, and state-like bodies. All those affected by Israeli government agencies, including non-citizens, can petition. This power has allowed the court to chart a course that strengthened liberal-democratic values. Moreover, in the 1990s the court assumed the authority of substantial judicial review, further buttressing its powers and further advancing Israeli liberal-democracy.<sup>4</sup> As a result, most basic freedoms of are generally cherished. Although some sectors challenge the court's activism, it enjoys high public esteem. The 2017 democracy Index conducted by the Israel Democracy Institute, showed that the court is the third most trusted public institution (out of ten) among the Israeli-Jewish population, and the second most trusted (out of ten) by the country's Israeli-Arabs.<sup>5</sup>

Scholars offer a number of explanations to the strength of Israeli democracy. First, although Jews generally did not enjoy sovereignty for two millennia, their communal institutions, at least in some cases, included democratic practices of sorts. For example, the Council of Four Lands that had limited authorities regarding the Jewish population in portions of Eastern Europe between the 16th and the late 18th century.<sup>6</sup>

Second, the pre-state Zionist institutions that developed since the late 19th century were generally democratic. These institutions had a profound effect on the design, norms and

1 Zenonas Tziarras, "Israel-Cyprus-Greece: a 'Comfortable Quasi-Alliance,'" *Mediterranean Politics* Vol. 21.3 (2016): 407-427.

2 Kenneth Bollen, "Liberal Democracy: Validity and Method Factors in Cross-National Measures", *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 37.4 (Nov. 1993): 1207-1230; John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

3 Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2018: Democracy in Crisis*, See: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2018> (accessed June 25, 2018)

4 Ehud Eiran, "Revolution and Counter Revolution: The Israel Supreme Court from the 1980s onwards", in: Itamar Rabinovich and Jehuda Reinharz (Eds.) *Israel in the Middle East*, Waltham MA: Brandeis University Press, 2008: 484-487.

5 Tamar Herzman, Chanan Cohen, Ella Heller, Tzipy Lazar-Shoef, Fadi Omar, *The Israeli Democracy Index 2017*, Jerusalem: Israel Democracy Institute, 2018. See: <https://en.idi.org.il/media/9837/israeli-democracy-index-2017-en-summary.pdf> (accessed August 20, 2018)

6 S. Zeitlin, "The Council of Four Lands" *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (Oct., 1948): 211-214





institutions of the proto-state's (*Yeshuv*) institutions, and later, the state.<sup>7</sup>

Functionalists suggest that Zionists found democracy to be the most effective form of political action in the specific circumstances of the movement. Zionism was a voluntary, monitory group within the Jewish people. It required a collective effort and the bundling of massive resources by political groups with significant political differences, who all, nevertheless, strove to create a Jewish state. Democracy was the most effective mechanism, it has been argued, to solve this collective action problem. The result, suggested leading Israeli sociologist, S.N Eisenstad, was not an American, French, or British democratic model, but rather a more consociational model (within the Jewish population) in which representatives of various groups created coalitions to advance specific policy goals, while they maintain autonomy in a significant number of areas such as educational systems. This was more potent in the proto-state phase (Yeshuv period), but in some areas remains to date.<sup>8</sup>

## Challenges to Israeli Democracy

The following section reviews the main challenges to Israeli democracy. It begins with a discussion of the foundational challenges that were present when the state was created and still affect, to an extent, current events. It then looks at two tensions: Israel's identity as both Jewish and democratic, as well as the tension between security and democracy. In the last section, I summarize the current immediate challenges to Israel's liberal-democracy.

### Foundational Challenges

Mainstream Israeli political sociologists suggest that it was far from obvious that Israel would have developed into a democracy. Shmuel Eisenstad pointed to five initial barriers for democratic evolution: (1) The majority of the Zionist immigrants that arrived in Palestine, and in particular, their political elite, came from areas in the world that had limited democratic traditions: mostly the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires (and their successor states). They had no experience of education, let alone participation, in democratic practices on a local or national scale,<sup>9</sup> although they had operated within,

and later inherited, British administrative and legal traditions.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, Botticini and Eckstein showed that from a rather early phase of post-second temple era, Jews were educated. This partly explained why they tended towards "middle class" professions mostly in the fields of trade and urban economies,<sup>11</sup> Social classes that are more supportive of democracy.; (2) Many of the ideological groups that led the Zionist movements, had a collectivist ideology, including the idea of "ideational collectivism", which inhibited an open democratic debate. Indeed, until the mid-1950s, the USSR was admired by significant sectors of Israel's labor elite (the political stream that controlled the political system 1933-1977), overlooking Moscow's authoritarian regime. In a famous 1949 speech, Meir Ya'ari, leader of the left leaning Mapam party (an important member of many government coalitions until 1977) even called the USSR: "our second homeland";<sup>12</sup> (3) Many of the social groups that arrived in Palestine as part of the Zionist movement did not have a strong experience of political-democratic constitutional participation. There were some limited organized life in non-sovereign Jewish communities, such as the Council of Four Lands, which had limited authorities regarding the Jewish population in portions of Eastern Europe between the 16th and the late 18th century.<sup>13</sup> Eisenstad, however, did not believe these reflected any significant democratic tradition, even if they did he argued that they would have automatically lead to democratic development later on; (4) Perhaps due to the lack of a central Jewish structure, political or religious, Judaism always had an element of anarchism coupled with beliefs among minority groups that they have access to "the truth". As Eisenstad points out, Max Weber was the first to identify this tendency, which he saw as reflected in the Hebrew prophet tradition. This belief in a "higher law", can lead – and did indeed lead numerous times – to the emergence of groups that challenged state law in the name of their access to this form of natural law; (5) The proto-Jewish state (Yeshuv) and the state of Israel evolved while confronting violent resistance from the indigenous Palestinian population (and after 1948) from the neighboring courtiers. As Eisenstad points out, these types of security pressures lead in many cases to severe constraints on democratic development.<sup>14</sup> Looking at all these, as well as at other factors, a groups of

7 Yossi Goldstein, "Between Herzl and Ben-Gurion: Democratic processes in the Zionist movement", in: Moshe Lisak et al. (Eds.), *In the Democratic Way: on the Historical Sources of Israeli Democracy*, Sde Boker, Ben-Gurion Institute, 2012 :247-282

8 Shmuel Noah Eisenstad, *Democracy and its Twists*, Tel-Aviv: Ministry of Defense Press, 2002

9 As noted above, Zionists did have some limited democratic experiences through Zionist politics. There are also a few rare cases of Zionist leaders who had actual experience in democratically elected national bodies before arriving to Israel (though usually in flawed democracies). Perhaps the most known one was Yitzhak Gruenbaum, Israel's first interior minister, who was a member of the Polish Parliament in the years 1919-1930

10 Yoram Shachar, Ron Harris, and Meron Gross, "Citation Practices of Israel's Supreme Court: Quantitative Analysis", *Mishpatim, Hebrew University Law Review*, Vol. 27. 1 (1996): 119-217 (1996) Assaf Likhovski "The Ottoman Legacy of Israeli Law", *Annales de la Faculté de Droit d'Istanbul* 39 (2007): 71-86, Assaf Likhovski, "The Time Has Not Yet Come to Repair the World in the Kingdom of God: Israeli Lawyers and the Failed Jewish Legal Revolution of 1948," in Ari Mermelstein et al.(eds.), *Jews and the Law*, New Orleans: Quid Pro Press, 2014), 359-383.

11 Maristella Botticini and Zvi Eckstein, *The Chosen Few: How Education Shaped Jewish History, 70-1492*, Princeton NJ: Princeton University press, 2012

12 Alon Pauker, "Ha'Kibutz Ha'artzi and the Admiration of the Soviet Union", *Iyunim Be'Tekumat Yisrael* 22 (2012): 64.

13 S. Zeitlin, "The Council of Four Lands" *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (Oct., 1948): 211-214

14 Shmuel Eisenstad, *Democracy and its Twists*, Tel-Aviv: Ministry of Defense Press, 2002



distinguished Israeli historians, and political sociologists who analyzed the history of Israel's democracy concluded in 2012 that: "we could have imagined... a historical move that was to be very different from the one that actually occurred, that is to say, the evolution of a non-democratic society".<sup>15</sup>

## Tensions between Jewish and Democratic Values

The goal of the Zionist movement was to create a Jewish state in Israel/Palestine, which would allow the Jewish people to exercise their right of self-determination and to provide them security. The rise of nationalism in Europe in the 19th century, and the horrific genocide directed at the Jewish people in the 1940s, provided the external legitimacy for the creation of a Jewish state. Indeed, it was sanctioned by both the League of Nations and the United Nations. Israel, therefore, defined itself from the start as a Jewish state, as the political entity that will allow the Jewish people to achieve self-determination. Israel's May 14, 1948 proclamation of independence begins with the statement that "The land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people... here their spiritual, religious, and political identity was shaped. Here they first attained to statehood". The proclamation further states that Jews have a "natural right" to be "master of their own fate, like all other nations, in their own sovereign state".<sup>16</sup>

What exactly constitutes a "Jewish state" remains an open question that is constantly debated and reshaped culturally, politically and in the legal sphere. Indeed, even the basic question of "who is a Jew" is contested in myriad arenas. For example, Israel's immigration law for Jews (the Law of Return) offers a broader definition of Jewish (for the purposes of immigration), than the one offered by traditional Jewish law. Similarly, the state of Israel, as manifested by the state's religious authorities (such as religious courts) does not recognize conversions conducted by Reform and Conservative Judaism, forms of Judaism that are dominant in the United States. To add another layer of complication: the specific relationship between Judaism (whatever the term may mean) and Zionism – the modern Jewish national movement – is complex. As Gersom Scholem, a leading mid-20th century Jewish philosopher and historian argued, "Zionism has never fully understood itself – is it a movement of continuity or a movement of rebellion. Since its early days, indeed since it began to manifest itself, Zionism had two diametrically opposing approaches within it... both beget a Zionism that is alive, and has its own dialectic, and have also led to all the troubles we are facing today... did we want to fundamentally alter this phenomenon called Judaism, or continue it".<sup>17</sup>

15 Alon Gal, "Introduction", in: Moshe Lisak et.al. (Eds.), *In the Democratic Way: on the Historical Sources of Israeli Democracy*, Sde Boker, Ben-Gurion Institute, 2012: 1

16 State of Israel, Proclamation of Independence, 14 May, 1948, see: [https://www.knesset.gov.il/docs/eng/megilat\\_eng.htm](https://www.knesset.gov.il/docs/eng/megilat_eng.htm) (accessed 6 August 2018)

17 Gersom Scholem, "Zionism: A dialectic of Continuity and Rebellion", in: Ehud Ben-Ezer (Ed.), *There Are no Complacent People in Zion: Conversations about the Cost of Zionism*, Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1986: 296-297.

Within this mix, a significant percentage of Israeli Jews define themselves as religious in practice and faith. A 2009 Gutman Center poll shows that the majority Israeli-Jews believe their Jewish identity to have the following core values: (1) A commitment to a ethno-religious group identity, and a sense of responsibility towards group members in Israel and abroad; (2) A commitment to the religious norms and ceremonies that prevail in this group (or at least amongst its more religious sectors), (3) a belief in a transcendental being. Some 80% of Israeli Jews polled stated that they believe in God. Significant majorities reported that they follow the rules regarding religious ceremonies including male circumcision, and food restrictions (Kosher food). Over 80% stated that without the Jewish religion, the Jewish people would not have survived into the modern era. The ethnic commitment was demonstrated as 73% stated that Jews all over the world share a "joint fate".<sup>18</sup> This data seems to indicate that there is high level of religiosity in Israel, which indicate support for a theocracy. This is not necessarily the case. Many of those who keep numerous traditions are not anti-democrats, as religious practice often has a cultural and family function, not necessarily theological-political. Nevertheless, the data indicates how much the ethnic identity (with a cultural-religious identity) is prevalent.

At the same time, the state committed itself to democratic values. The proclamation of independence commits the future state to the value of equality and to protect basic freedoms. Israel constitutional tradition that was developed by the Supreme Court and a number of Basic Laws generally upheld both the democratic and Jewish nature of the state. Section 1A to the 1992 Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty, for example, suggested that the purpose of the law is to "establish in a basic law, the values of the state of Israel and a Jewish and democratic state".<sup>19</sup>

Israel's self-identification as both Jewish and democratic poses possible tensions between democracy and the Jewish nature of the state on a number of levels. In part, as Israel's former Chief justice Aaron Barak admitted because "the statement, 'Jewish and democratic' is vague".<sup>20</sup> Israelis have been grappling with these issues for decades and much has been written in the topic. The following is a brief discussion of the main aspects of this tension.

On the philosophical level, there is a basic tension between Judaism's commitment to God's sovereignty, and the idea of the modern nation- state in general, and of democracy in particular, in which the source of legitimacy is the people's sovereignty. As Israeli right-wing philosopher (and one time monarchist) Israel Eldad wrote, "fundamentally, [in Judaism]

18 Ayale Keisar-Shugerman and Asher Arian, *Israeli Jews: a Portrait*, Jerusalem: Israel Democracy Institute, 2011. See: <https://www.idi.org.il/books/5958> (accessed 6 August, 2018)

19 State of Israel, Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty – 1992, See: [http://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/text.jsp?file\\_id=343838](http://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/text.jsp?file_id=343838) (accessed 6 August, 2018)

20 Aaron Barak, "Israel's Values as a Jewish and Democratic State", *Israeli Academy of Science Bulletin*, 2012: 60.



philosophically, and as a matter of belief, the supreme rule is the rule of God. The channels of this rule are the Torah<sup>21</sup> and the Mitzvot<sup>22</sup> and its supervisors are the monarchs, the prophets, and the wiseman. . . . However, if tomorrow 90% of the population will vote against one of the commandments such as circumcision, or keeping the Shabbat, will this decision have power according to Judaism?<sup>23</sup>

Initially, the tension was rather mild. Zionism was generally driven by secular nationalists, who viewed Zionism as the anti-thesis to the concept of God's sovereignty, with a de-facto credo of "we defend ourselves by ourselves". With the rise of national-religious ideology since the 1980s, this tension is more pronounced, as this ideology explained that even man-led activism that drove Zionism, is in fact, a phase, a step towards an eschatological messianic time that the secular participants are simply unaware of. Some national-religious leaders argue that as long as democracy was merely a mechanism to manage life through majority rule, it did not collide with their idea of Judaism, but once it is expanded to include more overt liberal elements, as occurred in Israel since the 1980s, there is indeed a greater tension.

The second level of tension is between some of the basic norms of Judaism with a liberal-democratic perspective. For example, reflecting a value system that is some two millennia old, Judaism stresses religious decrees and commitments of people, and does not have the newer (maybe 300 years old) concept of inalienable rights for individuals. Traditional Judaism also does not include equality as a central value. These tensions were one of the reasons why the Israeli legal system did not adopt Hebrew law (religious texts that offered legal norms and traditions) as its main source of inspiration. In a 1959 speech, Attorney General (and later Supreme Court Justice) Haim Cohen explained that when there is a conflict between Jewish law and "the needs and ethics of a free and progressive society," Jewish law would have to give way, and that "the adoption of Jewish law as the national law of Israel would not . . . be the proper answer to the challenge which the establishment of the State holds for the creative lawyer"<sup>24</sup> For generations, Judaism was rather effective in revising old decrees to changing realities through a sophisticated process of interpretations of the basic religious texts. For example, the bible allows men to marry multiple woman, as indeed most major biblical heroes did, However, as early as 1000 AD, most Jewish communities adopted an interpretation that ended this conduct. However, due to the specific path of political development of Israeli institutions, orthodox Judaism – that is now less open to revisions and interpretations – is the dominant version of Judaism in the eyes of the authorities, Zionism was led by secular nationalists, they too recognized the role of religion in the national project and developed a number of strategies to incorporate the Finally, Israel never

had a strict separation between Church and State. Upon its creation in 1948 the state left in place communal arrangements that dated back to the pre-1917 Ottoman rules (that survived under the British Mandate) by which religious communities rather than the state has the power over personal matters such as marriage, divorce, and burial. The state co-opted some of these religious institutions and made them state institutions but kept their religious nature. Moreover, the state funds and supports religious functionaries. As a result, religious authorities have a near monopoly over matters of marriage, divorce, and burial. The state further enforces some religious edicts in the public sphere. The net effect is a limited set of rights when it comes to religious matters, when compared to most western counties. For example, marriages that are prohibited under religious laws, cannot be conducted in Israel in a legally binding manner.

Those who had tried to reconcile the tensions, usually interpret the terms "Jewish", "Judaism", and "democracy" in ways that make them compatible. One approach, in this context, is to rely on Jewish texts that seem to support democratic and even liberal values. This approach is possible because, as noted by Jewish legal scholar Professor Ariye Edrei, "It is well known that the classic literature of the Halakha<sup>25</sup> is not constructed as a systematic body of law, but rather, as a literary body of work that presents halakhic problems and discussed various possible solutions." The Talmud,<sup>26</sup> as well as much of the literature that came afterwards, presents for the student, the variety of opinions that were stated during the conversation and discuss the set of options.<sup>27</sup> This ocean of interpretive possibilities provided over the years possible sources of legitimacy for both liberal-democrats, as well for their opponents, including support of monarchy. For example, Rabbi Baron Israel Immanuel Jakobovits, the late chief Rabbi of Great Britain wrote, "The modern democratic idea is an approach that that is mostly alien to the Torah and Judaism. Democracy, at its core, is the rule of the people as decided and coerced by the majority. Judaism and the history of the Jewish people reflect predominantly the victory of the minority."<sup>28</sup> On the other hand other religious sources highlight what they view as the democratic tendencies in Judaism. Despite the centrality of the rule of God, Rabbi Elisha Aviner, For example, argues that public legitimacy for leaders is a Jewish principle. In his view, the appointment and continued rule of a monarch depends on continued acceptance by the population. Not only at the moment of being appointed, but continuously.<sup>29</sup>

25 The two millennia-old body of Jewish law that is derived from written and oral sources.

26 The most important body of work (alongside the old testament) within the Halakha, and the most important creation of the mainstream post second-temple stream of Judaism, rabbinical Judaism.

27 Arye Edrei, "Command or Error: On the duty to Obey in Halakhic Thought", *Iyuniy Mishpat* (Tel-Aviv University Law Review) Vol. 24 (2001): 464

28 Israel Immanuel Jakobovits, "Judaism and Democracy", in Israel Immanuel Jakobovits, *The Legacy of the Minister*, Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1994: 249. There are of course checks and balances that mitigate the tyranny of the majority in modern democracy, but the text focuses on the threat of extreme majoritarianism

29 Elisha Aviner, "Introduction to Jewish Democracy, Tzvy: Jerusalem, 1995

21 The old testament

22 Religious commandments

23 Israel Eldad, "Zionism Against Democracy", *Nativ* 1, 1989: 4

24 Assaf Likhovski, "Argonauts of the Eastern Mediterranean: Legal Transplants and Signaling", *Theoretical Inquiries in Law* 10.2 (2009): 647.





The second aspect in which there is a possible tension between Israel's Jewish and democratic nature is the approach to the Arab-Palestinian minority, which comprises some 21% of territorial (pre-1967) Israel. Most elected members of Parliament that represent the Arab minority suggest that Israel does not balance well the Jewish (in the national sense) aspect of the state, and its democratic nature. As Dr. MK Ahmad Tibi has stated numerous times, "The state is democratic for the Jews, but Jewish to the Arabs."<sup>30</sup> A comparative perspective shows that Israel is a rather unique case. As leading Israeli sociologist Sammy Smooha explains, democracies with large ethnic minorities took one of two approaches: they either highlight the liberal individual aspect of citizenship, and did not privileging one ethnic group over the other, though they allowed, of course voluntary civic actions around ethnic identities; or, they accepted the role of ethnic groups, and developed a de-facto power sharing model, consociationalism. According to this approach, each ethnic group does enjoy some institutionalized, communal access to decision making and power, such as language rights, control over portions of the civil service etc. Smooha shows that Israel falls under neither model, as it does privilege the Jewish group, but does not generally award group rights to the Arab minority. Smooha calls this model, ethnic democracy.<sup>31</sup> Most Israelis accept this model and Israel's unique model. Those that are concerned by communal inequality in favor of Jews, stress the hope that the Palestinians will also have their collective right in a future nation state, and that Jews are entitled to the right of self-determination, like all other nations. More radical scholars, such as Yiftachel, argue that the clear preference towards Jews as a community, disqualifies Israel from being a democracy, claiming it is a form of government of ethnocracy.<sup>32</sup>

## The Tension between Security and Democracy

The region's hostility towards the Zionism and later towards the state of Israel, led to armed clashes and later major wars between Israel and its neighbors. These have shaped major aspects of the state of Israel and its society, placing a heavy human and material costs on the state and the population. The Israeli government counts almost 24,000 soldiers who have fallen in the conflict (since the 19th century) and some 5,000 civilians who were killed in terrorist attacks since 1950. Israel's security concerns are also grounded in Jewish historical memory, near and far. Jews faced numerous physical threats during the diasporic history including waves of violent attacks against them. Most horrifically, the industrial killing of third the Jewish people, some 6 million Jews in a genocide campaign, conducted by the German Nazis in the 1940s in the areas they occupied. Aspects of the Israeli discourse about current threats are framed through this historical experience. For

example, in a famous speech in 2006, Benjamin Netanyahu (then, still the head of the opposition) stated in a speech in Los Angeles that "it's 1938 and Iran is Germany". He also said there that the Iranian President is "preparing another holocaust for the Jews."<sup>33</sup> Research shows that once people believe they are under threat due to their identity, and not their actions, they will feel committed to the group identity, even at the cost of undermining basic aspects of democracy. For example, a 2009 project that included hundreds of in-depth interviews of Israelis, showed that: "When people believe they may be attacked merely for who they are, they hold more closely to their identity. Their sense of community narrows: only those who look like them are to be tolerated. They grow more supportive of policies to restrict or control minorities, the research found, and less supportive of pluralism or democracy."<sup>34</sup>

One aspect of the security threat, and Israel's effective response to it, is that Israel's armed forces are the most respected institution in the land. A vast majority (88%) of Israeli trust the armed forces, while only 15% trust the members of the Parliament.<sup>35</sup> The political system had over the years absorbed many senior military officers, as well as senior officials from other security services, such as the Shin Bet (the internal security agency). These institutions, as well as a large group that is connected to them, comprise what Sheffer and Barak call "Israel's security network" which they define as "a highly informal but simultaneously potent security network has influenced Israel's domestic sphere."<sup>36</sup> A strong military, coupled with limited trust in elected officials, as is the situation in Israel, can create space for military intervention in politics and the weakening of democracy.

Despite these security threats Israel was able to keep a thriving democracy, but the threat did create some challenges for democracy. First, some aspects of the Israeli legal system have tools that circumvent democracy, most notably, the government's emergency laws. Ironically, these were enacted by the British in 1945 to deal with the armed challenge Jews posed to London's rule in Palestine. However, they have since been used by the government for a variety of other measures that circumvent normal parliamentary rule, by giving the executive the power to legislate in certain matters. This is possible, as Israel is still technically in a "state of emergency", which is the basic condition for enacting these types of rules. Second, the threat led Israel to take military action

30 Yehonatan Lis, "Ahmad Tibi: The State is Democratic for the Jews, and Jewish to the Arabs", Haaretz, 22 December, 2009. See: <https://www.haaretz.co.il/news/politics/1.1296060> (accessed 19 August, 2018)

31 Sammy Smooha, "Ethnic Democracy: Israel as an Archetype", *Israel Studies* 1997 2.2: 198-238

32 Oren Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy: Land and Identity Politics in Israel/Palestine*, Philadelphia University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006

33 Peter Hirschberg, "Netanyahu: It's 1938 and Iran Is Germany; Ahmadinejad Is Preparing Another Holocaust", *Haaretz*, 14 November, 2006. See: <https://www.haaretz.com/1.4931862> (accessed August 26, 2018)

34 Daphna Canetti-Nisim, Eran Halperin, Keren Sharvit, Stevan E. Hobfoll, "A new stress-based model of political extremism: Personal exposure to terrorism, psychological distress, and exclusionist political attitudes", *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53.2 (2009): 363-389.

35 Israel Democracy Institute, Democracy Index 2017, December 2017, See: <https://www.idi.org.il/articles/20082> (accessed Aug 26, 2018)

36 Gabriel Sheffer and Oren Barak, *Israel's Security Network: A Theoretical and Comparative Perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013





that has long term detrimental effects on its democracy. Most notably, under threat of an Arab attack, Israeli forces occupied the West Bank and Gaza, which is largely populated by Palestinians.<sup>37</sup> On the current threat this occupation has for democracy, see below. There is also some evidence that the sense of threat is weakening support for individual rights when they are presumed to clash with security. For example, a 2015 poll that was taken in the midst of a wave of attacks on Israeli civilians, showed that 53% of Israeli-Jews support extrajudicial killings of Palestinians that attacked Jews, even if they no longer pose an immediate threat.<sup>38</sup>

## Four Concrete Threats to Israeli Democracy

With this background in mind, I turn to specific current threats to Israel's democracy. Data shows that in the last few years more and more Israelis fear that democracy is under threat. The 2017 democracy index of the Israel Democracy Institute, shows that 45% of Israelis polled think that the nation's democracy is under "severe threat". Among them are 72% self-identified "left wing voters" and 65% Israeli-Arabs. Only 23% of self-identified "right-wing voters" sensed a similar level of threat to Israel's democracy.<sup>39</sup>

### 1. Israeli Control over the West Bank

As discussed above in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Israel is in direct control of some 2.7 million Palestinians in the West-Bank. Although some parts of the region are legally under control of the Palestinian Authority, Israel remains the ultimate sovereign in the region.<sup>40</sup> Israel did not annex the region (barring a small sliver near Jerusalem), and rules it through a temporary mechanism of military rule, pending final political decision as to the future of the region. Israel negotiated with Jordan in the 1970s and with the PLO in the 1990s and 2000s a possible withdrawal from the West-Bank, but these talks did not conclude in a final status agreement. Israelis are divided over the question of withdrawal, as the region has security and religious/ideological significance for the Israeli-Jewish population and the state of Israel.

The West Bank is also home to some 300,000 Israeli citizens who reside in post-1967 settlements. These individuals, and their local government entities, enjoy most rights of Israeli citizens who reside in territorial (pre-1967 borders) Israel. The Palestinian inhabitants of the region have limited political rights. They cannot vote in Israeli elections, despite the fact that Israeli executive bodies (most of all, the armed forces) control the region and affect daily life in it. The semi-autonomous Palestinian Authority in the region has not held elections since 2006. The Palestinians in this region can still petition

the Israeli Supreme Court against the state, but generally, their level of freedom and access to democratic rights is far weaker that compared to citizens of territorial Israel. Freedom House gave the region a ranking of 28/100.<sup>41</sup>

Israeli leaders on the center and the left point to the occupation as a significant threat to Israeli democracy, and conversely, to the state's Jewish majority. If Israel will continue to occupy these areas without awarding citizenship to its inhabitants, it will cease to be a democracy. At least two former Israeli Prime Ministers, Ehud Barak and Ehud Olmert, warned that if Israel does not withdraw from the West Bank, it will become an "apartheid State".<sup>42</sup> Indeed, some public voices argue that this is already the situation.<sup>43</sup> If Israel annexes the West-Bank and awards citizenship to its Palestinians inhabitants, the state will no longer enjoy a Jewish majority, and arguably will lose its Jewish nature. This state of affairs also spells a threat to democracy. A group of mostly Israeli researchers showed in 2009 (using hundreds of in-depth interviews with Israeli Jews) that "when a majority demographic group believes it could become a minority, members of that group often become less supportive of democracy, preferring a strong ruler and harsh social controls, according to scholarly research on democratic decline."<sup>44</sup>

Some governmental and legislative actions that flow from Israel's control in the West-Bank further challenge liberal democracy. For example, in 2011, the Israeli Parliament passed a law that makes any calls for a ban on Israeli settlements in the occupied areas (or products and services that originate there), a source of a tort-type claim.<sup>45</sup> During the legislative process, the Parliament's legal Advisor, Eyal Yinon, warned that the law (then still in draft form) "harms the core of freedom of speech in Israel".<sup>46</sup>

41 Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2018: Democracy in Crisis*, See: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2018> (accessed June 25, 2018)

42 Rory McCarthy, "Israel risks apartheid-like struggle if two-state solution fails, says Olmert", *The Guardian*, 30 November 2007, See: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/nov/30/israel> (accessed Aug 26, 2018); Lizzie Dearden, "Israel's former Prime Minister says country faces 'slippery slope to apartheid'", *independent*, June 21, 2017, see: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/israel-palestine-apartheid-slippery-slope-ehud-barak-former-prime-minister-comments-netanyahu-a7801466.html> (accessed August 26, 2018)

43 Michael Sfarad, "Israel is Not a Democracy", *Haarerz*, June 1, 2017, see: <https://www.haaretz.co.il/opinions/premium-1.4137592> (accessed August 27, 2018)

44 Daphna Canetti-Nisim, Eran Halperin, Keren Sharvit, Stevan E. Hobfoll, "A new stress-based model of political extremism: Personal exposure to terrorism, psychological distress, and exclusionist political attitudes", *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53.2 (2009): 363–389.

45 The law for preventing harm to the state of Israel through boycott – 2011. See: <http://main.knesset.gov.il/Activity/Legislation/Laws/Pages/LawBill.aspx?t=LawReshumot&lawitemid=356973> (accessed July 18, 2018)

46 Arik Bender, "The Boycott law harms the core of Israel's freedom of expression", NRG, 11 July 2011. See: <https://www.makorishon.co.il/nrg/online/1/ART2/258/743.html> (accessed July 18, 2018)

37 Israel also occupied during the war the Golan Heights and Sinai

38 Israel Democracy Institute, Killing 'neutralized' terrorists in arenas of attacks', 10 November 2015. See: <https://www.idi.org.il/articles/2858> (accessed 26 July 2018)

39 Israel Democracy Institute, Democracy Index 2017, December 2017, See: <https://www.idi.org.il/articles/20082> (accessed Aug 26, 2018)

40 It is beyond the scope of this paper to review the background as to how Israel gained control of the region, and the various efforts to hand it to Jordan and the Palestinians.



## 2. Attacks on State and Civil Society Institutions

The last few years also saw efforts by the governing coalition, mostly Likud and the Jewish Home party, to weaken institutions that place checks on the executive branch, mostly the Supreme Court and law enforcement as well as the media. On May 29, 2018, the Attorney General Avichai Mendelblit, stated that "the law enforcement system is under attack". Specifically, he pointed to legislative initiatives that are intended to weaken the police and the state prosecution and limit their discretion. The Attorney General further warned against efforts to erode the public's trust in the law enforcement system.<sup>47</sup> Some of these legislative initiatives included an amendment to the criminal procedure laws in a way that prevents the police to submit its recommendations regarding prosecution when it concludes an investigation;<sup>48</sup> as well as a law that prevents the police from stating the reason why a criminal investigation was closed.<sup>49</sup> The Prime Minister and some of his close political allies continue to suggest that the law enforcement agencies are investigating the Prime Minister for political – not legal – reasons. This approach weakens public trust in a central pillar of any democracy, law enforcement and the state prosecution.

The Minister of Justice, Ayelet Shaked, is leading an open effort to re-shape the judicial system. The system generally enjoyed, as noted above, an impartial status, and its members succeeded for decades to preserve a "professional" rather than a "political" image. However, the current approach from the government gives preference to political loyalty over professionalism. Former Chief Justice Barak noted in June 2018 that the Minister of Justice is trying to appoint justices that have similar positions to hers, rather than the most qualified justices. Barak also noted that he can see similarities between the attacks on Supreme Courts in central European countries such as Hungary and Poland, and the attacks on the courts in Israel.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, the government and its supporters are attacking civil society institutions it views as a threat. For example, a number of civil society organizations that either support the liberal nature of Israel, or oppose the occupation, have been branded by right wing activists as traitors, and there is a rise in the number of attacks on their activists, mostly in the West-Bank. The government had also passed a number of legislative pieces that restrict aspects of NGOs that

opposes its policies, such as a 2016 amendment to existing laws that require NGOs that are receiving more than 50% of their budgets from "foreign political entities" to highlight in their publications, reports, and public appearances that are funded by non-Israelis.<sup>51</sup>

## 3. A Majoritarian Interpretation of Democracy

At least in part, the current attack on the checks and balances is a reflection of the third current challenge Israeli democracy is facing: a majoritarian understanding of democracy. Majoritarianism was always present in Israeli democracy, but it is gaining even further dominance in the last few years. For the purposes of this paper, majoritarianism means a system of government that is mostly a mechanism to reflect the majority's preferences in decision-making.<sup>52</sup> This, with limited regard to the preferences, indeed, at times, rights, of the minority. In its extreme model, majoritarianism is the tyranny of the majority. It is ironic that this approach has gained dominance in Israel, as Jews had traditionally been a minority in many places. Indeed, as discussed above, some of the Jewish-religious justifications for democracy focus on defending minorities, because the historical Jewish experience in the diaspora was one of being a minority. The majoritarian approach is partly a result of the historical development of the political institutions that evolved in Palestine in the Yeshuv era. The Zionists under the British developed a political structure that was meant to serve the Jewish community as part of a nation-building project. The project was legitimized by the international community as reflecting the Jewish right for self-determination. The British held sovereignty, while Jews and Arabs generally operated independently from each other. The British Mandate offered the Yishuv and the Palestinians to develop their own political institutions. The Palestinians refused in order not to legitimize the emerging national institutions of the Yishuv, while Jews took the opportunity to advance their project of self-determination. Once Israel was created in 1948, and included 170,000 Palestinian Arabs (which are now 1.7 Million), it continued its commitment to Jewish self-determination. While offering equal rights to all non-Jews, the state gave a privileged status to collective Jewish goals. Among other privileges: an immigration system that prefers Jews, official recognition of, and support to, Yeshuv era institutions (Jewish Agency, Jewish National Fund) that cater mostly to the Jewish population, Sabbath as the official rest day, as well as a focus on Jewish and Jewish Israeli themes in the education system. This majoritarian approach was not only directed towards non-Jews, but has been a feature in the political system in general. The system was ruled in the Yeshuv era and well into the state of Israel (1933-1977) by a

47 Revital Hovel, "Attorney General: Israel's Law Enforcement System Is Under Attack," *Haaretz*, 29 May, 2018, see: <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/attorney-general-israel-s-law-enforcement-system-is-under-attack-1.6131102> (accessed 22 June, 2018)

48 Maayan Lubell, "Israel pushes on with law seen protecting PM under criminal probe," *Haaretz*, 27 November 2017, Reuters, see: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-netanyahu-law/israel-pushes-on-with-law-seen-protecting-pm-under-criminal-probe-idUSKBN1DR2JD> (accessed July 26, 2018)

49 Jonathan Lis, "Israel Passes Controversial Law Muzzling Police on Criminal Investigations," *Haaretz*, July 18, 2018, see: <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium-israel-passes-law-muzzling-police-on-closed-criminal-cases-1.6289358> (accessed July 26, 2018)

50 Almog Ben Zichri, "Aharon Barak: Shaked is trying to appoint judges that think like her, even if they are not Meanches," *Haaretz*, June 2, 2018, see: <https://www.haaretz.com/news/law/1.6137978> (accessed August 26, 2018)

51 Moran Azulai, "The NGO Law Was Approved: commotion in the Knesset, and removals from the chamber." *YNET*, 12 July, 2016, See: <https://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0.7340.L-4826969.00.html> (accessed 18 September, 2018)

52 For a discussion on majoritarian vs., other models of democracy (such as a consensus-based see: Arend Lijphart, *Democracies: Patterns of Majoritarian and Consensus Government in Twenty-one Countries*, Yale University Press, New-Haven CT: 1984



single party that generally refused to include in its coalition some minority parties it deemed “beyond the pale” such as the communists and the right wing Herut (later *Likud*). The even used the internal security bodies against some opposition voices (though in a very limited way).

By the late 1960s, *Herut* (by then the major part of the broader *Gahal* party and on the way to transforming into *Likud*) became an acceptable political partner to the majority party. In the 1980s and 1990s, a political draw between the two major parties, a stronger Supreme Court, as well as liberal basic laws, led to a decline in some of the majoritarian aspects of Israeli politics. At the highest point of non-majoritarian politics, Arab non-Zionist parties were, in effect (though not formally) part of the governing coalition between 1992-1995. However, almost two decades of mostly Likud rule, as well as the general turn to the right in the Israeli public, brought back majoritarian politics. Perhaps, as Professor Amichai Cohen suggested, this is because the right wing does not think it will ever be in the opposition again, and does not see any future benefit from placing constraints on the government or on avenues for public dissent against the government.<sup>53</sup> This is mostly manifested in efforts by the government and right wing political activists to de-legitimize elements of the opposition, as well as legislation that prioritizes the majority even at a cost of an injury to the minority. For example, before the 2015 elections, the threshold to be eligible to have a seat in Parliament was raised to from 2% to 3.25% of the voters, in a move that was understood by many as directed to weaken the Arab votes; A 2016 amendment to the Basic Law: The Knesset, allows a super majority in the Parliament to remove a member of the house from his or her office under certain circumstances.<sup>54</sup> In 2017, the Minister of Education tried to coerce Israeli universities to accept a “code of conduct” that would prevent university teachers from expressing their political opinions in classes. The July 2018 nation-state law in the most recent peak of this trend. The law – which is largely declaratory – sets the foundational aspects of Israel such as its basic principles, its symbols, capital and language. The law reasserts that Israel is the nation state of the Jewish people, and that within its territory it is the only nation that enjoys these rights. The drafters of the law were specific, using the term “the State of Israel”, rather than the broader term “the Land of Israel”, which includes also the West Bank. The law makes no mention of the value of equality, degrades, in effect, the status of the Arabic language, and gives preference for

Jewish settlement,<sup>55</sup> which led some to fear that it will serve as a base for further discrimination against non-Jews.<sup>56</sup>

#### 4. Corruption

The last few years saw a dramatic rise in the public’s perception that Israel is a corrupt country. Multiple studies have shown how corruption erodes democracy. Specifically, scholars demonstrated that corruption diverts “resources from disadvantaged people...damages the rule of law, social justice and lowers the trust of citizens in political institutions and processes.”<sup>57</sup>

In a 2016 poll, 72% of Israeli believed that Israel is a corrupt country. Almost a quarter of these thought Israel is highly corrupt.<sup>58</sup> Some 92% polled thought that one needs to know “powerful people” in order to advance “anything” in Israel.<sup>59</sup> A 2010 poll showed that 68.8% of the sample population believed that Israel is more corrupt than it used to be.<sup>60</sup> Some of the data seems to support this public assertion. As Doron Navot reports, the number of members of the Israeli Knesset that were stripped of their parliamentary immunity from prosecution for presumed corruption-related, doubled every 20-25 years.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, he shows that while many of the past cases were related to “public corruption”, i.e. illegal use of privilege to serve a greater cause, such as ones party; more recent cases of corruption mostly serve the personal interests of the culprits.<sup>62</sup> In 2014, for the first time in Israel’s history, a former Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, was convicted on corruption allegations and was awarded a jail sentence.<sup>63</sup> By 2018, Israel’s current Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, was being investigated in four separate cases of possible

53 Amichai Cohen, *Fragile Democracy*, Jerusalem: Israel Democracy Institute, 2017. See: <https://www.idi.org.il/articles/16180> (accessed August 26, 2018)

54 Maria Newman, “Knesset approves controversial law to remove lawmakers from office”, *Times of Israel*, July 20, 2016. See: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/knesset-approves-bill-to-remove-lawmakers-from-office/> (accessed July 26, 2018)

55 State of Israel, Basic Law: the Nation State – 2018, See: [https://www.haaretz.co.il/embeds/pdf\\_upload/2018/20180719-031321.pdf](https://www.haaretz.co.il/embeds/pdf_upload/2018/20180719-031321.pdf) (accessed 6 August, 2018)

56 The Association of Civil Rights in Israel, *Nation State Law*, July 20, 2018. See: <https://www.acri.org.il/en/2018/07/20/nation-state-law/> (accessed 26 July, 2018)

57 Inna Kubbe and Anka Engelbert, “Corruption and the impact of Democracy”, *Crime, Law, and Social Change*, Published online July 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10611-017-9732-0>

58 Channel 2, “72% of the Israelis – the country is corrupt”, *MAKO*, 8 January, 2016, see: [https://www.mako.co.il/news-israel/local-q1\\_2016/Article-f9ef7d24abe1251004.htm](https://www.mako.co.il/news-israel/local-q1_2016/Article-f9ef7d24abe1251004.htm) (accessed 18 July, 2018)

59 Channel 2, “72% of the Israelis – the country is corrupt”, *MAKO*, 8 January, 2016, see: [https://www.mako.co.il/news-israel/local-q1\\_2016/Article-f9ef7d24abe1251004.htm](https://www.mako.co.il/news-israel/local-q1_2016/Article-f9ef7d24abe1251004.htm) (accessed 18 July, 2018)

60 Doron Navot, *Political Corruption in Israel*, Jerusalem: Israel Democracy Institute, 2015: 23

61 Doron Navot, *Political Corruption in Israel*, Jerusalem: Israel Democracy Institute, 2015: 13

62 Doron Navot, *Political Corruption in Israel*, Jerusalem: Israel Democracy Institute, 2015: 14

63 Prime Minister Olmert was convicted on charges that emanated from the period he served as The Mayor of Jerusalem’s mayor Jodi Rudoren, “Former Israeli Leader Is Convicted of Taking Bribes”, *New York Times*, 31 March, 2014, see: [https://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/01/world/middleeast/former-israeli-leader-ehud-olmert-is-convicted-of-taking-bribes.html?ref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FOlmert%2C%20Ehud&action=click&contentCollection=timestopics&region=stream&module=stream\\_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=5&pgtype=collection](https://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/01/world/middleeast/former-israeli-leader-ehud-olmert-is-convicted-of-taking-bribes.html?ref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FOlmert%2C%20Ehud&action=click&contentCollection=timestopics&region=stream&module=stream_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=5&pgtype=collection) (accessed July 24, 2018)





corruption.<sup>64</sup> On the other hand, the fact that a Prime Minister can be prosecuted and indicted illustrates that nobody is above the law, and that, despite corruption, democracy on this level is functioning.

### Recommendations for Israel

Challenges to democracy in Israel are driven, at least in part, by physical insecurity (such as terrorism) and cultural/identity insecurity. Economic insecurity is a potential threat to democracy, as was the case in Europe in the 1930s and today; in the current situation, economic insecurity does not seem to threaten Europe in the same way. Therefore, Israel should utilize the Eastern Mediterranean alliance to respond to these insecurities. Specifically, economic gains from the energy finds that should be channeled to avenues that will support the sense of economic security of Israeli citizens and, in particular, the middle class, which is the backbone of liberal-democracy in most Western countries. This could be advanced by committing a portion of the gains to basic entitlements such as health and education, or a generous support system for retraining professionals who are at risk of losing jobs in the face of technological change. Special effort should be made to use the funds to ease sectorial tension and advance the integration of Israeli-Palestinians and Ultra-Orthodox Jews into Israeli society, and the labor force. Funds should be directed on an equal basis, or possibly even on the basis of affirmative action for the Arab and the religious orthodox community to support their socio-economic inclusion and diffuse sectorial tension.

In terms of security, the alliance should be used by the Israeli government in a more pronounced way to address Israeli security concerns. Specifically, the partnership could be used to signal to the Israeli public that the alliance is a testament of Israeli strength, its regional dominance, as well as signaling the concrete security gains from the alliance (such as the ability to use Cypriote naval and airports, assuming this is indeed possible). At the same time, it is crucial that Israel make an effort to make sure the alliance is not framed as western Judeo-Christian construct that is at odds with the Arab and Muslim world. Moreover, Israel should be careful that the alliance would be interpreted as it further turning its back to the region, thus absolving itself from the need to engage with the Arab world and the Palestinians.

Moreover, Israel should strive to include Egypt and Jordan in the quasi-alliance. Egypt is already involved in a trilateral exchange with Greece and Cyprus, and has developed a joint security agenda with Israel in Sinai and Gaza. Therefore, it should be relatively easy to expand the quasi-alliance in this direction. Jordan does not have a Mediterranean shore, but is close enough to the region to be included. It is most likely to benefit from Israeli gas exports and has a shared set of interests with Israel. Including both Arab nations is essential to mitigate

any suggestion that the Israeli-Greek-Cypriote quasi-alliance is a Western construct whose purpose is to confront the Arab east. The inclusion of Egypt and Jordan could further upgrade security in the Eastern Mediterranean and perhaps even lead to development of a regional security regime. Such a regime can be constructed around the development and export of energy resources. In this context, the Gaza Marine gas field can be developed and integrated into the energy and security. Another possibility would be to work together with the United States (mainly via Israel) and Russia (via Cyprus and Greece) to seek a super-power understanding regarding the security of the Eastern Mediterranean, accepting Russian interests north of the Cyprus-Latakia line and US-Israel-Cyprus-Greece Egyptian interests south of this line. Specifically, this could serve a de-facto recognition that each party can operate in a limited area, to prevent accidents and escalation. To date, Israel enjoys freedom of action, of sorts, in areas in Syria where the Russian operates. It could seek similar arrangements within the context of the deal proposed above. With the region now a potential area of conflict between Russia and the United States, and with Europe as the arena of this conflict (and the entity that has most vital geopolitical interests in the Mediterranean) – the alliance might seek ways and means for Europe to find supportive understandings with Russia in the north and the USA in the south. A kind of Helsinki Forum could be developed - at first by a civil society strategic dialogue, and later by the governments.

Finally, the alliance holds the promise of helping Israelis to develop an ideational framework that will be integrate them – in terms of identity – into the region. More than a century after the Zionist movement was launched it generally views itself as separate from the broad Middle East. This is not only due to the conflict but is also a function of ethnic and religious differences, as well as the specific path of political development that led to the creation of Israel. Similarly, it seems that the region still views Israel as a foreign entity that was forced on the region by a European colonial project. Indeed, it seems that of Israel's own Arab citizens view it that way.<sup>65</sup> The idea of integrating Israel into the region through the development of Israeli identity in the direction of Mediterranean identity has been raised by Israeli intellectuals for a few decades, but has not gained much traction. Israeli writer A.B. Yehoshua has been a leading proponent of the idea (alongside David

<sup>64</sup> Oren Liberam, "Netanyahu corruption probes: What you need to know", CNN, February 13, 2018. See: <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/02/13/middleeast/netanyahu-corruption-probes-israel-intl/index.html>

<sup>65</sup> For example, a 2006 vision document that was written by leading Palestinian intellectuals in Israel, for example, explains that: "Israel is the outcome of a settlement process [In the Hebrew version: "a colonialist action"] initiated by the Zionist-Jewish elite in Europe and the west and realized by Colonial countries contributing to it and by promoting Jewish immigration to Palestine, in light of the results of the Second World War and the Holocaust. After the creation of the State in 1948, Israel continued to use policies derived from its vision as an extension of the west in the Middle East and continued conflicting with its neighbors. Israel also continued executing internal colonial policies against its Palestinian Arab citizens." The National Committee for the Heads of the Arab Local Authorities in Israel, *The Future Visions of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel*, Nazareh: Al Woroud, 2006: 9





Ohana<sup>66</sup> and others). In a 2014 article he suggested that if Israel “wants to ensure itself a lasting existence in the area that was the base and origin of the formation and growth of the people of Israel, it must find a path of renewal by deepening its Mediterranean identity and integrating Mediterranean cultural, spiritual, economic and historical elements into its current western identity. Moreover, the country must foster

<sup>66</sup> David Ohana, *Israel and Its Mediterranean Identity*, New-York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2011, Eran Lerman, “In Front of Us: the Mediterranean Sea, Ha’Shiloah 1, 2017. See: <https://hashiloach.org.il/%D7%95%D7%9E%D7%9C%D7%A4%D7%A0%D7%99%D7%9D-%D7%94%D7%99%D7%9D-%D7%94%D7%AA%D7%99%D7%9B%D7%95%D7%9F/> (accessed August 16. 2018)

creative channels that make a new contribution to the Mediterranean identity of its neighbors”<sup>67</sup>

Creating a Mediterranean identity may entail a more rigorous dialogue with the EU - and coordinated thinking about the re-invention of the Barcelona Process, and the current state of the Union for the Mediterranean. Specifically, this will require the strengthening of the institutional social, cultural, religious and political dialogue between all littoral states of the Mediterranean on a more equitable level.

<sup>67</sup> Abraham B. Yehoshua, “The Mediterranean Israeli Identity”, *Quaderns de la Mediterrània* 20-21 (2014): 63



## Joint Recommendations

### Introduction

This chapter represents the joint recommendations of all partners to the project with respect to how to implement greater Eastern-Mediterranean cooperation, on the basis of advancing liberal democratic values.

It is important to note that the cooperation between Israel, Cyprus and Greece, need not be strictly trilateral. It is not necessary that all three countries participate equally, or even at all, on all levels, and in all fields, of their mutual cooperation. It is, however, important, that there is communication, coordination, and exchange of information between the three on all issues of mutual interest. The creation and development of trust and goodwill is an essential prerequisite of any deeper cooperation. The trilateral partnership can be envisaged on a governmental, business, civil society, and/or citizen-to-citizen level.

### A Joint Commitment to Democracy

The three countries should highlight the liberal-democratic ethos that binds them together. This language should be inserted to joint statements on all levels, which would further cement the alliance according to these values. Moreover, stressing the democratic aspect rather than the power-based considerations can mitigate suggestions that this is an Israeli-Western alliance to balance against the Muslim world including Iran, Turkey and Arab countries. Israel-Cyprus and Greece could become a center for assisting the EU and African states to deal more successfully with the refugee question. This would include assistance in preparing more controlled immigration to European countries and assistance where possible to encourage repatriation to their former home countries. In addition, possibly together with Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinians, the quasi-alliance could work to strengthen indigenous economies particularly in Africa.

The three countries should develop an ideational liberal-democratic framework that is better suited to their unique circumstances, including the presence of an ethnic conflict as well as the influx of asylum seekers. All three societies give a central role for ethnic identity, as well as organized religion. Both latter issues create tensions with democracy. Much could be learned from each country's experience. Such learning can be facilitated through academic exchange programs, civil society interaction, and joint public event that are intended for mass media consumption. In this context, they may want to leverage the symbolic power of the two of the capitals, Athens and Jerusalem, which still hold a special image in Western minds as the birthplace of Democracy (Athens) and as one of the holiest cities in the world (Jerusalem).

It is not clear if the current governments in the three counties are willing and capable to advance such as a task. Therefore,

civil society actors in all three societies should strive to develop a joint agenda. An arena that lends itself for such an effort is education. All three countries are deeply engaged in internal debates about their national identity. Both due to their foundational framework (in the case of Cyprus and Israel), as well in the face of migration from the Middle-Eats and Africa. Joint educational efforts can address questions of pluralism and each society's response to the challenge.

### Using the Liberal Democratic Narrative as an Instrument of Policy

Personal freedom and dignity are central tenets of liberal democracy, as is every person's right to define and pursue his chosen way of life. Yet, liberal democracy has never been firmly established in the Eastern Mediterranean or the broader Middle East. It, nevertheless, formed an important part of the narrative that supported Western presence in the region. However, the idea that liberty is the foundation of good governance, security, modernity and economic prosperity has always been challenged. Political Islam claims to be the only path to a righteous life, while many sponsors of illiberalism put forth their own plans for economic prosperity. These two paradigms of righteousness and illiberal prosperity have held considerable appeal for the people of the region.

A closer partnership between the liberal democracies of the Eastern Mediterranean, namely Israel, Cyprus and Greece, would reinforce the notion that the struggle in the region is not between materialism (be it liberal or illiberal) and the divine message of Islam, but rather a bid for human freedom and human dignity. Without doubt the application of liberal democracy in all three states is not without flaws. Nevertheless, the liberal democratic model, for all its shortcomings, offers more to its citizens than the barren austerity of the theocratic regime or the arbitrary oppression of illiberal economic prosperity. The partnership could also help them deal with the internal challenges of their own democracies, as well as create a unified front on the regional battlefield of ideas.

The liberal-democratic ethos is what binds the partners together and lies at the heart of their cooperation. This should be highlighted in all undertaken activities and projects. The language of such ethos should be inserted into joint statements on all levels, further cementing the partnership according to these values.

Use of the liberal democratic narrative in the trilateral agenda should, where possible, be coordinated with the EU. Since the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Middle East, lies on its doorstep, it is in the EU's best interest to promote liberal democratic values in this corner of the world. Cyprus, Israel and Greece should also strive to become the spearhead of the EU Neighborhood Policy, offering assistance to EU democratization efforts in the region.



## Establishing an Institutional Platform

In 2014, the Secretaries General of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Israel, Cyprus, and Greece established the procedure of regular political consultations, and Trilateral Steering Committee was established in January 2016 to coordinate and supervise the cooperation agenda.<sup>1</sup> A wide variety of fields of cooperation has been identified, including energy, information communication technologies, digital technology, environment, search and rescue, agriculture, health, tourism, combating terrorism education, sustainable development, cultural heritage, and defense.<sup>2</sup>

Based on the already established cooperation framework, a future and long-term trilateral partnership should endeavour to establish a formal institutional mechanism or platform. At its core, the trilateral platform would have the objectives to preserve, strengthen and promote the principles of liberal democracy, human rights, individual freedoms, as well as the fostering of economic prosperity through trade, transportation and communications. Common security concerns should also be addressed as a natural development within a framework created to safeguard the common values and principles shared by all the partners.

The main objectives of the platform would be to:

- Identify regional issues of common concern where inter-regional cooperation could be fostered, as well as formulate coordinated policies in dealing with such issues;
- Promote effective cooperation between industry and government authorities, concerned communities and other relevant stakeholders;
- Promote the development of a regional energy industry that could drive future East Mediterranean regional integration;
- Expand strategic, intelligence and military cooperation that would help to secure and defend the infrastructure and resources of the Eastern Mediterranean energy industry and bring economic development to the region;
- Expand security cooperation among the cooperation partners to ensure the physical security of their citizens;
- Mitigate threats as well the ability for populist leaders to construct and overblow imagined threats;

- Facilitate regional civil society development through joint projects in the fields of education, research, human rights protection, culture and information;
- Promote the protection of regional cultural heritage;
- Ensure that environmental laws and regulations are upheld in a socially responsible manner;
- Strengthen and promote liberal democratic principles, including:
  - strengthening and emphasizing the importance of individual rights;
  - setting benchmarks for human rights protection with emphasis on gender equality as well as religious, ethnic and other minorities;
  - setting benchmarks for anti-corruption and the rule of law.

This mechanism could also coordinate the diasporas of the three states and encourage expatriate organizations to liaise on a systematic basis. To this end, support should be given to already established contacts between expat organizations and advocacy groups, such as the bipartisan Congressional Hellenic Israel Alliance in the U.S.<sup>3</sup>

While there are various models that the trilateral platform could be based on, one such model worth considering is that of the Nordic Co-operation.<sup>4</sup> After centuries of common history, cultural heritage, as well as regional military conflicts, the Nordic Co-operation emerged in the 1950s with the establishment of a formal inter-governmental cooperation between, primarily, Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Iceland. In 1962, with the establishment of the Helsinki Treaty, the cooperation also came to include Finland and the autonomous areas of the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and the Åland Islands. One of its key purposes is to promote Nordic and regional interests and values, thus aspiring to make the Nordic region one of the most innovative and competitive region in the world. The structure of the cooperation between the Nordic states is twofold and includes the inter-governmental cooperation, managed by the Nordic Council of Ministers, and the inter-parliamentary cooperation, managed by the Nordic Council.

By evolving into a platform, similar to that of the Nordic Cooperation, it would ensure the establishment of a permanent mechanism of contact and cooperation augmented by technocratic and entrepreneurial contributions. In addition to a bureaucratic secretariat, this institutional structure could include other stakeholders, such as professionals and

1 Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Greece, Israel and Cyprus Hold Political Consultations in Athens," 14 November 2014, see: <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/PressRoom/2014/Pages/Political-consultations-Greece-Israel-and-Cyprus-12-Nov-2014.aspx>;

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus, "Cyprus – Israel - Greece Trilateral Summit Declaration," 28 January 2016, see: <http://www.mfa.gov.cy/mfa/mfa2016.nsf/All/225D5758514728BBC2257FA000459B4B?OpenDocument&print>

2 Press and Information Office, "Cyprus-Greece-Israel 4th Trilateral Summit Declaration," Press Release, Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Cyprus, 8 May 2018, see: <https://www.pio.gov.cy/en/press-releases-article.html?id=1656#flat>

3 The Congressional Hellenic Israel Alliance (CHIA) was launched in 2013 by the Hellenic American Leadership Council and the American Jewish Community. Among the initiatives promoted by the CHIA has been ending the Cyprus arms embargo as well as halting the F-35 fighter jet sales to Turkey. Tom Ellis, "HALC, AJC Join Forces in Effort to Bolster Cyprus Security, Halt Sale of F-35 Jets to Turkey," *eKathimerini*, 7 May 2018, see: <http://www.ekathimerini.com/228354/article/ekathimerini/comment/halc-ajc-join-forces-in-effort-to-bolster-cyprus-security-halt-sale-of-f-35-jets-to-turkey>

4 See: Nordic Co-operation, <http://www.norden.org/en>.



business representatives, academics, journalists and civil society organizations that would constitute the second and third pillars of the platform.

### Pilot Programs and Initiatives

There are several pilot programs and initiatives on the governmental and civil society levels can be launched in order to deepen the partnership. On a governmental level, such programs could include deepening energy cooperation, the concept of the Cyprus port to serve Gaza, the monitoring of the migration flows to Europe, Greek-Cypriot diplomatic effort to improve Israel-EU relations, security-related initiatives, anti-corruption effort, as well as projects aimed at facilitating cooperation in the business sector. All these projects and initiatives could serve the security and political interests of all three countries in a practical way that could illustrate the effectiveness and the utility of the trilateral partnership. On a civil society level, the cooperation could, initially, include several research and educational projects aiming at promoting people-to-people relations between the three partners. In the long-term, it would serve a wider objective of developing a common Levantine/Eastern Mediterranean cultural identity with liberal democratic values at its core.

### Regional Energy Cooperation

The energy sector is an established cornerstone of the existing trilateral cooperation. The development of a regional energy sector, both hydrocarbon and renewable, has been declared as a catalyst for peace, stability and future cooperation.<sup>5</sup> Projects such as the EuroAsia Interconnector, the Eastern Mediterranean Pipeline, and international exports from LNG facilities in Egypt, are all considered to be of strategic importance. If successful, they would integrate the energy markets of Israel and Cyprus with those of Greece, and continental Europe. In 2016, a Permanent Ministerial Committee on Energy was established at the Trilateral Summit in Nicosia, in order to consider the strategic and practical aspects of increased energy cooperation. In addition to the projects already mentioned, future cooperation within the energy field should also aim to establish frameworks for facilitating cross-border exploration and transit of energy resources as well as promotion of joint energy infrastructure projects, and infrastructure protection contingency planning.

### The Gaza Service Port

The concept of establishing a maritime passage between Larnaca and the Gaza Strip first emerged during the 2015 negotiations between Hamas and the Middle East Quartet.

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus, "Cyprus – Israel – Greece Trilateral Summit Declaration," 28 January 2016, see: <http://www.mfa.gov.cy/mfa/mfa2016.nsf/All/225D5758514728BBC2257FA000459B4B?OpenDocument&print>

The idea was reintroduced by Israel in 2018.<sup>6</sup> The scheme would include detailed planning on issues such as:

- Feasibility and Political Implications;
- Location;
- Manning/Personnel;
- Logistics;
- Infrastructure;
- Control of goods in transit (GIT);
- Technical monitoring of GIT;
- Storage of GIT;
- Escort of GITs from Cyprus to Gaza;
- Sources of funding/International donors;
- Issues related to the EU.

### Migration Monitoring in the Eastern Mediterranean

Israel, Cyprus and Greece could become more proactive in assisting the EU to deal more successfully with implementing more orderly migration into Europe. A joint migration monitoring scheme would include:

- Sharing of intelligence;
- Establishing monitoring mechanisms;
- Coordinating search and rescue;
- Establishing methods of registering migrants;
- Establishing and implementing methods and techniques of verifying migrant data;
- Establishing and implementing methods and techniques of storing and analyzing refugee data;
- Issues related to funding;
- Issues related to the EU.

### A New EU-Israel Initiative

Greece and Cyprus should assist to further pro-Israeli EU policies and help increase Israel's leverage within the EU on matters of economic and political cooperation, especially in the field of energy, technology, and trade. Cyprus and Greece should also join other pro-Israel EU member states in a diplomatic effort to enhance Israel's relations with Brussels. The first such initiative could be focused on the resumption of the EU-Israel Association Council.

<sup>6</sup> Staff Reporter, "Israel Agrees to Gaza-Cyprus Sea Route," *Cyprus Mail*, 13 August 2015, see: <https://cyprus-mail.com/2015/08/13/israel-agrees-to-gaza-cyprus-sea-route/>  
Michele Kambas, Ari Rabinovitch, Dan Williams, Nidal al-Mughrabi, Timothy Gardner, Alexandra Hudson and Grant McCool, "Israel Asks Cyprus to Consider Shipping Route for Gaza: Cypriot Official," Reuters, 26 June 2018, see: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-cyprus-gaza/israel-asks-cyprus-to-consider-shipping-route-for-gaza-cypriot-official-idUSKBN1JM1Z2>





## Security-Related Initiatives

On a security level, the partnership must be based on a closer understanding of each participant's security needs and how they could be mutually served. Cypriots must understand the geostrategic and political role that Cyprus plays for Israel and must be willing to play this role. On the same token Israelis must be willing, to the extent that it is in line with their own security and defense interests, to support their Cypriot neighbors on issues that are important to them. The same should ideally hold true with Israeli and Cypriot relations with Greece, bearing in mind, however, that the latter does not face the existential challenges faced by its two partners in the region.

Greece, of course, faces challenges of a different nature, mostly from internal political and economic instability related to European sponsored post-national state developments, and loss of sovereignty. On this issue both Cyprus and Israel are at a critical juncture regarding their own evolution from national to pluralist state. All three countries may benefit, therefore, from a reaffirmation of the values and principles that form the basis of their way of life, in a region where such values, and the freedoms which they guarantee, are mostly absent.

With regard to Greece and Cyprus, it is important that Israel be able to communicate the crucial nature of its own security dilemmas. People in Cyprus, and especially Greece, must understand the essential context of Israeli decisions, and actions, regarding the Palestinians, and their other Arab neighbors. This is particularly important in the face of growing European skepticism, and even hostility towards the Israeli policies.

Security-related initiatives could include:

- Establishing a defense and security cooperation council with the aim of strengthening trilateral partnership multilateral efforts to build credible deterrence in its area of interest;
- Establishing an intelligence committee tasked with developing tripartite channels of intelligence-sharing and exchange of information;
- Know-how exchange on combating terrorism with the use of science and technology.

## Anti-Corruption Initiatives

In contrast to Cyprus and Greece, Israel has a long list of public officials convicted in high profile corruption cases, proving low tolerance for corruption in the country, in particular when national security is at stake. The Israeli experiences should serve as a lesson to Cyprus and Greece that an efficient and independent judicial is the pillar of a just society ensuring that the rule of law, the principle value of liberal democracy, is upheld. The three countries should launch a joint anti-corruption initiative, including:

- Organizing expert seminars and workshops for the exchange of expertise on effective tackling of corruption;

- Organizing a regional anti-corruption summit that would address region-specific issues related to corruption and offer recommendations tailored to regional political and social realities.

## Business Initiatives

Facilitating private business relationships between the three states is an important part of cementing a sustainable future cooperation.

A Memorandum of Cooperation between the Chambers of Commerce of Cyprus, Israel, and Greece was signed during the 2018, 4th Trilateral Summit in Nicosia, with the aim of facilitating investment, trade, energy cooperation, technology transfer, joint ventures and business development. In addition to this effort, the prospect of establishing a government-sponsored trilateral business platform should be explored. Such a platform would enable businesses collaboration, encourage entrepreneurship, and promote innovation and technological know-how exchange. The already established Cyprus Egypt Greece Collaborative Innovation Network (CEG COIN)<sup>7</sup>, could stand as a model for such a project.<sup>8</sup>

## Civil Society Initiatives

With regard to civil society and citizen-to-citizen exchanges, a lot can be accomplished through the linkage and cooperation of academic, governmental, semi-governmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as student and other personnel exchanges. Such efforts should be on a systematic level and should be supported by both government and private funding.

The main goal of a trilateral cooperation on this level would be to foster cultural ties among the partners in order to build a common regional identity based on the idea of the Eastern Mediterranean as a separate geopolitical and cultural unit founded on the values of liberal democracy. All three countries are deeply engaged in internal debates about their national identity, but also struggle with defining their supranational identities due to particular geographic location at the crossroads of three continents, diverse cultural influences as well as unique historical experiences. All three give a central role to ethnic identity, as well as organized religion, both of which create tensions with democracy. Much could be learned from each country's experience in this regard. Civil Society actors in all three countries should strive to develop a joint agenda aiming at developing an ideational liberal-democratic framework rooted in a shared Levantine cultural heritage.

<sup>7</sup> The CEG COIN, established in 2017, is a platform that aims at fostering collaboration and business matchmaking between Egypt, Cyprus and Greece. in the three countries.

<sup>8</sup> Cyprus Egypt Greece Collaborative Innovation Network (CEG COIN), see: <http://www.cegcoin.net/>



Civil Society projects could, therefore, include:

- Launching student exchange programs and summer schools;
- Developing a web portal for journalists, researchers, academics, and analysts focused on the Eastern Mediterranean affairs and cultural developments (content would include news, opinions, analyses, essays, etc.);
- Creating a network of regional think-tanks for developing dialogue and deepening research on the issues of regional importance, providing an in-depth analysis of regional developments, as well as recommendations for the policy-makers;
- Creating joint mechanisms by which both Israel and Cyprus would attempt to deal with their ethnic conflicts based on an individual rights approach;
- Establishing a trilateral fund for the purpose of financing joint civil society projects (the financing would be provided by the governments as well as private donors).

### Extending Trilateral Cooperation Regionally

While initially focusing on the relations between Israel, Cyprus and Greece, the trilateral platform should be open

to participation from all states in the region and devoted to creating a truly integrated and prosperous region that would benefit the entire population of the Eastern Mediterranean. In this respect it should be noted that a parallel trilateral cooperation has emerged between Cyprus, Greece and Egypt. This cooperation shares similar areas of focus as that of Israel, Cyprus, and Greece, namely: security, business innovation, environment, and tourism, among others.<sup>9</sup> The two trilateral cooperation mechanisms should eventually strive towards complementing each other, with the possibility of both being merged into a larger regional cooperation framework. Such a framework should also remain open to participation of major non-regional actors.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Press and Information Office, "Remarks by the Minister of Energy, Mr Y. Lakkotrypis, at the Signing of the Agreement Between Cyprus and Egypt for the Submarine Natural Gas Pipeline," Press Release, Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Cyprus, 19 September 2018, see: <https://www.pio.gov.cy/en/press-releases-article.html?id=3772#flat>  
Press and Information Office, "6th Cyprus- Egypt-Greece, Trilateral Summit, Crete, 10 October 2018 - Joint Declaration," Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Cyprus, Press Release, October 10, 2018, see: <https://www.pio.gov.cy/en/press-releases-article.html?id=4135#flat>

<sup>10</sup> Cyprus Agency News, "Kammenos Refers to Broadening Greece-Cyprus-Israel Cooperation to Include USA," 10 October 2018, see: <http://www.cna.org.cy/WebNews-en.aspx?a=46449a206daa4c69959bd65cf3cbc2eb>





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