

 MDC The Middle East Center  
for Middle Eastern and African Studies 

# TURKEYSCOPE

INSIGHTS ON TURKISH AFFAIRS  
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## From the Editors

Dear Friends,

The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies is proud to present the March 2017 issue of our monthly publication, *Turkeyscope*. In this issue, Moshe Kamhi, from the Economic Affairs division of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, analyzes the trade ties between Israel and Turkey. The second article, written by Hay Eytan Cohen Yanarocak, discusses the impact of the recent Turkish soap opera, *Payitaht*, on Turkish society and the Erdoğan administration's desire to reshape the country's historical narrative.

Sarah Jacobs contributed to this issue as assistant editor.

# Prospects on Israeli - Turkish Trade Ties in the Aftermath of the Reconciliation

Moshe Kamhi

Considering the recent political normalization between Jerusalem and Ankara, economic ties are central to bilateral relations. Therefore, careful analysis of economic developments, business ecosystems, and sectoral priorities remains essential to strengthening economic cooperation between the two states.

During the nineties and the first decade of the twenty-first century, bilateral treaties improved economic ties between Turkey and Israel. The Civil Aviation Agreement, signed in 1951 and amended in 2009, paved the way for an unprecedented number of flights between Tel-Aviv and Istanbul. The Free Trade Zone Agreement, signed in 1996 and implemented in 1997, contributed to increased trade between Turkey and Israel and the establishment of solid commercial networks in many sectors.

## Recent Trade Developments<sup>1</sup>

Between 2015 and 2016, as between 2014 and 2015, exports from Israel to Turkey dramatically declined, while exports from Turkey to Israel proved less volatile. Israeli exports to Turkey dropped from \$2.7 billion in 2014, to \$1.7 billion in 2015, then to \$1.1 billion in 2016.<sup>2</sup> Even taking currency fluctuations into account, this represented a significant decline.

A glance at the breakdown of exports by sector reveals that the decline in Israel's exports is a result of the fact that these exports emanated almost entirely from the petrochemical industry. In the past decade, oil prices have dropped, global commerce has contracted, demand for petrochemicals has been more competitive, and currency value has declined.<sup>3</sup> As Israeli exports to Turkey are not diverse, these global declines have taken their toll. When petrochemicals are ignored, we see more consistency in trade trends. Therefore, diversifying Israeli exports to Turkey should involve small and medium size companies and would serve to cushion fluctuation in petrochemical exports.<sup>4</sup>

In contrast, Turkish exports to Israel have been more variegated, resulting in a less acute decline. These exports include raw minerals, equipment for construction, machinery and electric equipment (*white goods*), vehicles, textiles, and food, among others.<sup>5</sup> Turkish exports to Israel also tend to be more end consumer oriented. In 2016, Turkey exported \$2.6 billion to Israel - 6 percent more than the previous year.

It should be noted that civil aviation is the primary service shared between the countries, with two regular carriers and occasional chartered flights. The scheduled carriers operate eleven to fourteen daily flights between Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion Airport and Istanbul's Atatürk Airport or Sabiha Gökçen Airport. Close to 90 percent of the current traffic is transit, with most passengers continuing on to other

destinations. Turkish Airlines is the second largest traffic carrier at Ben Gurion Airport, with El-Al remaining ensconced as the largest carrier. Outside Turkey, Ben Gurion Airport is the most frequent single destination airport for Turkish Airlines. These regular flights facilitate economic cooperation from the perspective of geographical proximity. The fact that a business person, a researcher, or a civil servant can travel to any of the two countries in the morning and return home by evening has significant effect.

### **Challenges for the Future**

This geographical proximity presents a unique opportunity for the creation of new business partnerships. The development of Israeli-Turkish partnerships will allow for diversification of goods traded, expanding beyond the parameters of the extant export industry. Business circles in both countries exhibit an entrepreneurial spirit that can be harnessed to engender growth. Partnerships in the private, government, and public sectors are significant. Business circles will have to create new ties on a sectoral basis. However, the contact points between sectors and umbrella organizations are still in their early stages.

Developments in global and regional markets may constitute new opportunities. As both Turkey and Israel prioritize technological innovation, the countries should also explore ways to ensure cooperation in this sector. One possible opening for cooperation is the expansion of the Israeli technology parks in Turkey such as the GOSB technopark in Gebze that was inaugurated in 2005.<sup>6</sup>

Developments of the goods and services track, changing economic ecosystems, regulatory standards, and industry-oriented scientific and technological innovation must be systematically studied, in order to identify areas for possible cooperation. Government, public, and private sectors can contribute to this task, through seminars, meetings, and visits to both destinations. Additionally, feasibility studies will assist in the prioritization of investment.

Trade has functioned as a bridge between the two countries. Existing institutional frameworks, geographical proximity, and congruent business cultures have kept trade exchange on track. This positive development has proved sustainable despite a challenging political climate and decline caused by the global economic crisis. Joining forces in the search for innovative projects will continue to be the key to enhancing further economic ties between the two peoples. Government agencies, including the division of Economic Affairs within the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, will contribute to bilateral trade, as they have in the past.

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## Decoding the "Payitaht Abdülhamid"

Hay Eytan Cohen Yanarocak

During the last decade, the Turkish film and television industry has experienced significant growth, producing numerous soap operas popular in Turkey and abroad, particularly in the Middle East. This popularity stems from the series' non-obscene, family-friendly themes. Moreover, the length of each episode, typically two to three hours with commercials, means that viewers spend whole nights watching the same channel. Combined with this consumer behavior, high ratings have paved the way for a broad commercial market, profitable for soap opera producers. This cycle enables producers to launch more expensive and ambitious projects.

On February 24, Turkey's state run TRT-1 (Türkiye Radyo ve Televizyonu - Turkish Radio and Television) launched one such project, a new television series called "Payitaht - Abdülhamid" (Capital - Abdülhamid). The new series sympathetically portrays the reign of Abdülhamid II (1876-1909), one of the Ottomans' most controversial sultans. Until today, his supporters, mostly composed of Islamists, dub him "the Supreme Sultan" (Ulu Hakan). In contrast, his adversaries, pioneers of Turkey's secularization and Westernization movement, refer to him as "the Oppressor" (Müstebid) or "the Red Sultan" (Kızıl Sultan), due to his bloody campaign against the Armenians.<sup>7</sup> Analysis of "Payitaht" provides insight into the ruling elite's utilization of Abdülhamid's historical legacy.

Responding to this history, both supporters and detractors of the sultan, see Turkey's current President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as the twenty-first century heir to Abdülhamid II's legacy. The secular camp uses the slogans of their nineteenth century comrades, such as "Down with oppression! long live freedom!" (Kahrolsun İstibdat! Yaşasın Hürriyet!).<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, the conservative pro-government channel, "A Haber" (A News), produced a documentary on Abdülhamid II, highlighting positive similarities between Erdoğan and the Ottoman Sultan.<sup>9</sup> Abdülhamid's centralized state, his grandiose 1,464 kilometer long Hejaz Railway,<sup>10</sup> and his other reforms were portrayed as directly parallel to Erdoğan's desired presidential system and pharaonic projects. One such project, the "Marmaray," an under-water subway tunnel connecting Europe and Asia, was initiated by Abdülhamid. Today, Abdülhamid's portraits overlook the Marmaray stations.

As Turkish history textbooks curate a pro-Western, anti-Abdülhamid history, the pro-Abdülhamid narrative of the pro-government circles represents another challenge to the established secular historical narrative.

Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, a former lecturer at the University of Ankara, pioneered this pro-Abdülhamid narrative. Kısakürek was an anti-secular, Turkish-Islamic nationalist who spent many years in prison because of his critiques of the secular political system, which he called a cheap imitation of the West.<sup>11</sup> In his work, Kısakürek

openly described the Ottoman Tanzimat reforms (1839), which officially launched the country's Westernization campaign, as the beginning of the corruption of the Ottoman system. Kısakürek portrayed the Pan-Islamist Abdülhamid II, who used the title of caliph more than any other sultan, as the only ruler who sought to protect the empire's integrity. Kısakürek glorified Abdülhamid as his "historical friend," while implicitly disparaging his "historical foe," Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of secular Turkey.<sup>12</sup>

Kısakürek summarized his view towards Abdülhamid with the well-known slogan: "Understanding Abdülhamid is the key to understanding everything" ("Abdülhamid'i anlamak herşeyi anlamak demek olacaktır"). In other words, Sultan Abdülhamid functioned as a litmus test for Turkish political attitudes. Kısakürek asked people to disregard the constant defamation of Sultan Abdülhamid by secular governments. By doing so Kısakürek attempted to neutralize pro-Western critiques of the sultan. In order to defend Abdülhamid, Kısakürek targeted critics' supposed underlying motives, rather than the content of their critiques.<sup>13</sup>

Having been raised and educated in conservative religious circles, it is no secret that President Erdoğan is deeply influenced by Kısakürek's work. In the first Necip Fazıl Kısakürek Prizes ceremony, initiated in 2014 by the pro-government newspaper *Star*, President Erdoğan openly praised Kısakürek for his effort to disrupt the secular Kemalist single-party period's "alienated, non-traditionalist way of thinking."<sup>14</sup> Today, the last remnants of this way of thinking and its narrative in history textbooks are being eliminated. Ambitious reform by the Turkish Ministry of National Education seeks to diminish the position of secular Atatürkism in the Turkish curriculum, while expanding content on the public's resistance to the failed coup attempt of July 15, 2016.<sup>15</sup> In light of this education reform, the timing of the new television series "Payitaht" is no coincidence.

The series' portrayal of the sultan is steeped in Kısakürek's narrative. Seeing Abdülhamid through this lens develops viewers' sympathy for the implementation of Abdülhamid's harsh policies against the press, journalists, and intellectuals. "Payitaht" underscores Abdülhamid's virtues with a contrasting demonization of the Ottoman intellectuals of his period, including Abdülhamid's nephew, Prince Sabahattin - an important Ottoman intellectual who defended individualism and pragmatism against the forces of excessive centralization.<sup>16</sup>

In the first two episodes of "Payitaht," Prince Sabahattin is portrayed as a traitor, undermining the empire in the name of "freedom." In order to cope with this threat from within, Abdülhamid's sophisticated system of informers is presented as essential to the state's protection from the global superpowers - controlled by mysterious, covert societies - and their internal collaborators, like Prince Sabahattin. Each scene of "Payitaht" is designed to be reapplied to current Turkish politics, whitewashing viewers' perspectives on Erdoğan's hardline stance vis-à-vis the press.

That being said, the show casts Prince Sabahattin and his fellows as proxies for the Zionist Jews and Freemasons, portrayed as the main culprits of the empire's accelerating decline. The ideological father of political Zionism, Theodore Binyamin Ze'ev Herzl, is characterized as an obsessive personality seeking to establish a Jewish state "from the Nile to Euphrates." In order to sidestep accusations of antisemitism, the producers of "Payitaht" sought to distinguish between their desired type of Jew, one that was not seeking independent statehood, and the Zionist Jew, who was seeking a territorialized national identity. In the show, Theodore Herzl imprisons his father, Jacob Herzl, due to anti-Zionist political views. In reality, Jacob Herzl was a delegate in the second Zionist Congress. However, in the show's first episode, Jacob Herzl preaches that Judaism does not command the establishment of the state of Israel. The father reveals his son to be a heretic, plotting to establish a Jewish state in the land of Israel by controlling global media. In a subplot, a failed assassin named Hiram - bearing the Freemasons' Grandmaster's name - even seeks to mobilize traitorous Ottoman soldiers by using a coin engraved with the Star of David.

These storylines are derived from Kısakürek, who claimed that the Jews, the Dönmes (the Jews who converted to Islam), and the Freemasons' hidden agendas were at the root of the Ottoman's problems. According to this worldview, these groups successfully mobilized the Ottoman Army to overthrow Abdülhamid II in 1909, with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's participation as a young officer. Kısakürek went even further, designating Turkish Jewish statesman Hayim Nahum as the political actor solely responsible for the establishment of a secular, instead of Islamic, Turkish state.<sup>17</sup> Kısakürek's emphasis on clandestine activities is echoed in current Turkish politics. For example, Erdoğan's well-known "Mastermind" (Üst Akıl) accusation locates mysterious external actors' so-called interventions in the interplay of daily Turkish politics.<sup>18</sup>

To target Turkish citizens outside the classroom, it seems that the Turkish government seeks to integrate television into its re-indoctrination campaign. Its approved television series, broadcast by state run television channel TRT-1, instills a pro-government historical narrative. Like viewers of the "Magnificent Century," a television series that covered Süleyman the Magnificent's reign (1520-1566), many who watch "Payitaht" unquestioningly accept its contents as historical fact.

Marketed through billboards, as well as traditional and social media, "Payitaht" is having impact beyond the realm of television. By providing the sultan with a saintly afterglow, the show attempts to repair Abdülhamid's badly damaged reputation and crown him a role model in competition with Atatürk. This proliferation of the sultan's new image continues with the probable naming of Istanbul's third airport after Abdülhamid, while Istanbul's Atatürk airport is soon to be shut down.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Trade figures mentioned are usually in US Dollars.

<sup>2</sup> Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) Report – "Israel – Turkey Trade Relations, 2016.

מכון היצוא - ד"ח - יחסי סחר ישראל-טורקיה"

<sup>3</sup> Israel Export and Economic Cooperation Institute, Annual Report, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid: Many business people have reported drops in gains from exports to Turkey. It is too early to speculate on how the depreciation of the Turkish Lira vis-à-vis US and EU currencies will influence trade between Israel and Turkey.

<sup>5</sup> The drop in import of vehicles can be explained by diversion to other sources due to either price considerations or types of vehicles.

<sup>6</sup> "Gebze teknoparkı faaliyete geçti", NTV, April 14, 2005, <http://arsiv.ntv.com.tr/news/210814.asp>

<sup>7</sup> François Georgeon, *Sultan Abdülhamid* (Istanbul, İletişim, 2015) pp. 423-428 (François Georgeon, Abdulhamid II, le sultan calife)

<sup>8</sup> <https://twitter.com/FeryalKarakulak/status/837261980998201346>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TSEitYEIhIs&t=6238s&index=3&list=PLaM7CSk8-cAS0vaHGQF4KBPqzEv8oJIXs>

<sup>10</sup> Metin Hulagu, *The Hejaz Railway* (Izmir, Blue Dome, 2010) p.xxv

<sup>11</sup> Fahrettin Altun, "Alternatif Tarih Yazmak: Necip Fazıl Kısakürek'in Hafıza Siyaseti" in Asım Öz and et.al (Eds.), *Necip Fazıl Kitabı, Sempozyum Tebliğleri*, (Istanbul, Zeytinburnu Belediyesi, 2015) pp.325-361

<sup>12</sup> Mustafa Armağan, "Necip Fazıl'da Tarihin 'Dönüş'ü" in Asım Öz and et.al (Eds.), *Necip Fazıl Kitabı, Sempozyum Tebliğleri*, (Istanbul, Zeytinburnu Belediyesi, 2015) p.317

<sup>13</sup> Mustafa Armağan, "Necip Fazıl'da Tarihin 'Dönüş'ü" in Asım Öz and et.al (Eds.), *Necip Fazıl Kitabı, Sempozyum Tebliğleri*, (Istanbul, Zeytinburnu Belediyesi, 2015) pp.315-317

<sup>14</sup> "Cumhurbaşkanı Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Necip Fazıl ile olan anısını anlattı", Hürriyet, November 3, 2014, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/cumhurbaskani-recep-tayyip-erdogan-necip-fazil-ile-olan-anisini-anlatti-27506507>

<sup>15</sup> "MEB'in yeni müfredatı; Atatürkçülük kalktı; 15 Temmuz geldi", T24, January 15, 2017, <http://t24.com.tr/haber/mebin-yeni-mufredati-aturkculuk-kalkti-15-temmuz-geldi,383165>

<sup>16</sup> Yahya Akyüz, *Türk Eğitim Tarihi*, (Ankara, Pegem, 2015) p. 313

<sup>17</sup> Fahrettin Altun, "Alternatif Tarih Yazmak: Necip Fazıl Kısakürek'in Hafıza Siyaseti" in Asım Öz and et.al (Eds.), *Necip Fazıl Kitabı, Sempozyum Tebliğleri*, (Istanbul, Zeytinburnu Belediyesi, 2015) pp.325-361

<sup>18</sup> Burak Bekdil, "Turkey's Supposed Nemesis: 'The Mastermind'", April 27, 2015, <https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/5608/turkey-antisemitism-mastermind>