

## **Cross-National Politics And Tourism: The Growth Of Israeli Tourism In Greece**

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### **Abstract**

*Greece, as a tourist destination, is gaining more and more popularity among Israeli travellers. This increased response from the Israeli market and the choice of Greece as a tourist destination is due to multiple factors, such as accessibility and improved airline connections, historical and cultural bonds, security, stability and diversity of the country.*

*However, the most important factor is the significant geopolitical and geo-economics changes have taken place in the Eastern Mediterranean environment from 2008 onwards. Following that, the change made by Greece in its foreign policy in the recent decade contributed substantially to the fervent rapprochement between Greece and Israel. Specifically, the deepening of diplomatic relations between the two countries with the main purpose of promoting development and stability in the Eastern Mediterranean, and the mutually beneficial cooperation in areas such as trade, economy, investments, tourism, defence, energy, shipping, education, and technological, agricultural and environmental development.*

*Undoubtedly, the continuous rise of tourism from Israel to Greece opens up prospects for further cooperation and mutual economic benefit. In the following analysis, a more extensive reference is made to the increase in tourist flows from Israel to Greece in recent years, as well as to the main factors that led to it.*

**Key words:** Greece, Israel, tourism, development factors, agreements

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### **I. Introduction**

Tourism has evolved into one of the most dynamically developing industries with a significant impact, sometimes crucial, on national, regional and local economies. Therefore, its management and sustainable development is the subject of government policies, which in turn affect the sensitive tourism sector<sup>1</sup>. The tourism industry represents one of the key factors contributing to addressing the challenging economic conditions in contemporary Greece. The importance of this industry for the Greek economy is due to the country's rich natural and cultural resources<sup>2</sup>. Remarkably, due to its geographical location, Greece serves as a significant geopolitical hub between South-eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa. It is surrounded by the Ionian Sea to the west, the Aegean Sea to the east, and the Mediterranean Sea to the south<sup>3</sup>. As a result, it wields substantial influence in both the maritime and continental regions, while its location continuously attracts the attention of global actors seeking power and influence<sup>4</sup>.

Thus, owing to its strategic advantage in the Balkans, which serve as the gateway to Europe, Greece is often the subject of updated political negotiations between states seeking influence in this geographical area<sup>5</sup>. Over the years, the Balkans have experienced a multitude of disruptions due to their unique geopolitical and geostrategic significance, as Great Powers have always made efforts to advance their interests in the region,

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<sup>1</sup>Stogiannos, A. & Botsis, M., Tourism politics or tourism geopolitics? Proceedings 11 th International Conference on Contemporary Marketing Issues, p. 474-481, <http://iccmi2023.org/wp-content/uploads/ICCMI-2023-Conference-Proceedings.pdf>

<sup>2</sup>Sfakianakis, G. & Agiomirgianakis, G., Determinants of tourism demand in Greece: a panel data approach, *Econometrics*, 43, 2014, p. 15 – 26.

<sup>3</sup>Şahin, I. & Yazıcı, H., Greece's "changing" Israeli and "unchanging" Egyptian policy. *Yönetim ve Ekonomi Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 19(3), 2021, p. 115

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

typically shrouding them in the guise of ethics and international law<sup>6</sup>. Of course, the perspective of political realism, which has prevailed in the field of international relations, advocates that power is the one which shapes the international order and plays a central role in determining moral and international legal parameters<sup>7</sup>. This is rooted in the fact that the basic principles of realism in international relations recognize the international order as an imperfect battlefield, which sometimes overlaps with a legal framework<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, the acquisition of any form of power, whether military, defensive, economic, political, or even cultural, emerges as the primary objective of every state<sup>9</sup>.

Since 2008, the complex geopolitical situation in the Eastern Mediterranean is characterized by a series of conflicts and the formation of new alliances<sup>10</sup>. This area has been a hotbed of tension due to differing views and claims regarding maritime borders, oil exploration, energy security and the quest for power<sup>11</sup>. An unexpected alliance that emerged on the occasion of the aforementioned is that of Greece and Israel. The geopolitical interdependence and the recognition of common interests have created the framework for the strengthening of cooperation and friendship between these two countries, whose relations have developed in such a way and speed<sup>12</sup> that it might have been difficult to imagine in the past, considering the strong support of Athens for the Palestinians and the close bilateral relations between Israel and Turkey in the 1990s<sup>13</sup>.

In addition, it was clear that the global financial crisis of 2008, the Greek debt and the austerity measures shaped the need for Greece to revise its political approach<sup>14</sup>. Israel tried to convince the leaders of the European Union to provide financial support to Greece, despite the fact that was unable for Israelis to offer much aid<sup>15</sup>. Also, the growing trade reconciliation and the increase in the number of Israeli tourists visiting Greece had a positive impact on its economy<sup>16</sup>. With the aim to analyse the increased tourist wave of Israeli visitors to Greece, it would be valuable to evaluate the relations between the two countries.

## **II. Greek-Israeli relations - Review**

The relations between Greece and Israel are formed through various factors, evolved from time to time and despite the impressive changes in Greek political leadership in recent years, the ties between the two countries have strengthened even more<sup>17</sup>. Greek-Israeli relations have always been significantly influenced by the nature and course of Greek-Arab and Turkish-Israeli relations, as well as by the existence of common interests<sup>18</sup>. In particular, the closer Greece was to the Arab countries, the more distant was from Israel, however when its relations with Turkey went through a crisis, Greece looked for a regional and essential ally in Israel<sup>19</sup>. Specifically, Greek-Israeli relations have a long history, starting in 1917, when Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos expressed support for the creation of a Jewish state, before the Balfour Declaration<sup>20,21</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup>Botsis, M., *Geopolitics of the Adriatic - Ionian: The case of Corfu*, Athens, Papazisi Publications, 2005, p.7

<sup>7</sup>Ibid

<sup>8</sup>Ibid

<sup>9</sup>Ibid

<sup>10</sup>Stergiou, A., *Greek-Israeli Defense and Energy Ties: Writing a New Chapter in Bilateral Relations*. *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, 9(3), 2015, p. 425

<sup>11</sup>Mazis, I., *The Mediterranean Geopolitical Structure and the Matter of Resolving the Cyprus 3 Issue in Accordance With the Annan Plan*, *Academia European Union*, 14, 2004, p. 382.

<sup>12</sup>Tziampiris, A., *The Emergence of Israeli-Greek Cooperation* (Berlin: Springer, 2015), p. 8

<sup>13</sup>Lindenstrauss, G., &Gavrielides, P., *A Decade of Close Greece-Israel Relations: An Assessment*. *StrategicAssessment*, 22(1), 2019, p. 51-52.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid, p. 56

<sup>15</sup>Ibid

<sup>16</sup>Ibid

<sup>17</sup>Lindenstrauss&Gavrielides, (2019) p. 58

<sup>18</sup>Tziampiris, (2015) p. 8

<sup>19</sup>Ibid

<sup>20</sup>Stergiou, (2015) p. 417

<sup>21</sup> The Balfour Declaration expresses the favorable stance of the British Empire towards the establishment of a national Jewish state in the region of Palestine. The declaration, named after the British Foreign Secretary Lord Arthur Balfour, was formulated on November 2, 1917. In 1922, the League of Nations accepted the declaration and included it in the official requests for the protection of the region under a mandate from the British Empire. Due to this acceptance, the Balfour Declaration marked a significant milestone for the Jewish people and received international recognition as an intention to establish a Jewish state in the region of Palestine. Stein, L. *The Balfour Declaration* (New York, 1961).

However, after the establishment of Israel in 1948, relations between the two countries were initially formed with an ambivalent perspective, characterized by mutually conflicting feelings, accusations, and even hostility<sup>22</sup>.

Greece recognized the state of Israel de facto towards the end of 1949, establishing its relations with Jerusalem flexible during the Cold War period<sup>23</sup>. Although the period of the war was an era of frozen relations, Greece, in its general direction, did not adopt a hostile attitude towards Israel or Global Judaism<sup>24</sup>. After World War II, Greece adopted a pro-Arab policy in the Middle East, serving its vital interests at that time, such as protecting Greek communities, acquiring cheap Arab oil, supporting the Cyprus issue, controlling the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, and ensuring unrestricted passage through the Suez Canal<sup>25</sup>. In November 1947, Greece, along with Arab and other Muslim countries, voted against the partition of Palestine and the creation of a Jewish state<sup>26</sup>. Within the framework of the United Nations, Greece continued to unofficially vote against Israel and in favour of Arab positions, expressing its support for the Arab cause<sup>27</sup>. This pro-Arab approach strengthened economic cooperation between them, but in general, Greece's pro-Arab foreign policy had limited results<sup>28</sup>.

Therefore, there was a decrease in Greek pro-Arab policies, and at the same time, the geostrategic importance and significance of Israel in the Eastern Mediterranean region were recognized. Thus, in the 1950s and 1960s, Greece began to develop diplomatic relations with Israel, and specifically in 1952, it attempted to significantly improve these relations by lowering the level of diplomatic representation in Jerusalem<sup>29</sup>. However, the road to substantial improvement in Greek-Israeli interstate relations opened with Greece's full recognition (de jure) of the Israeli state in 1990<sup>30</sup>. However, public opinion in Greece during the 1990s held a negative view of Israel due to anti-American sentiment<sup>31</sup> and the belief that Israel was a protected state of the United States, the Palestinian issue, and Israel's strong relations with Turkey<sup>32</sup>. For that reason, during that decade, the relationship between the two countries was not as warm as it is today. Nevertheless, bilateral relations had some positive elements and goals despite the differences in the foreign policies of the two countries. In the mid-1990s, Greek Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou attempted to improve relations with Israel, aiming to strengthen economic and trade ties despite some past differences and reservations on the part of Israel due to Greek support for the Palestinians<sup>33</sup>.

Before 2008, the aforementioned factors hindered the approach and strategic cooperation between the two countries, and their contacts were temporary and superficial, primarily driven by each side's interests without a common willingness to deepen the relationship<sup>34</sup>. However, from 2008 onwards, the deterioration of bilateral relations between Turkey and Israel, the discovery of hydrocarbons in the Eastern Mediterranean region, and the Greek economic crisis led to a fundamental change in Greek-Israeli relations. Specifically, from 2010 to the present, Greek foreign policy towards Israel has been changing positively<sup>35</sup>. The historic exchange

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<sup>22</sup> Stergiou, (2015) p. 418

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p.417

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> ISA, "October 1948–April 1949," Documents on the Foreign Policy of Israel vol. 2, (Jerusalem, 1984), pp. 546–47 as well as "May–December 1949," vol. 4 (Jerusalem, 1986), p. 513–15, 530, 664–66, και 735–37.

<sup>26</sup> Stergiou, (2015) p. 417

<sup>27</sup> The Greek diplomatic authorities consistently attempted to reassure the Israelis by stating that Greece's primarily pro-Arab stance at the United Nations aimed to preserve its ability to act as a mediator in the Israeli-Arab conflict. ISA, Folder 15-12-2003, Documents 282300417 and 28230444; ISA, Documents on the Foreign Policy of Israel, vol. 13 covering the period 1958–59, p. 289.

<sup>28</sup> Stergiou, (2015) p. 417

<sup>29</sup> Sakkas, D. G., Greece in the Mediterranean, 1950 – 2004, Association of Greek Academic 17 Libraries, Athens, 2015, p. 24

<sup>30</sup> Sakkas, D. G., Greece in the Mediterranean, 1950 – 2004, Association of Greek Academic 17 Libraries, Athens, 2015, p. 24

<sup>31</sup> Athanassopoulou, E., "Responding to a Challenge: Greece's New Policy Towards Israel", SE and Black Sea Studies, Vol3 Issue 1, 2003, p. 118.

<sup>32</sup> Athanassopoulou, E., "Responding to a Challenge: Greece's New Policy Towards Israel", SE and Black Sea Studies, Vol3 Issue 1, 2003, p. 118.

<sup>33</sup> The anti-American sentiments in Greece stem from grievances such as the acceptance by the United States of the military junta in Greece during the years 1967-1974 and the perception that they did not halt the Turkish military intervention in Cyprus in 1974. (Couloumbis, T., & Moulakis, A., "Are the Greeks Anti-American?" Wilson Center Website, July 7, 2011, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/are-the-greeks-anti-american.>)

<sup>34</sup> Nakhmani, A. (2003). "Israel, Turkey, and Greece: Turbulent Relations in the Eastern Mediterranean." Papazisi Publications, Athens, p. 66.

<sup>35</sup> Stergiou, (2015) p. 421

of visits between the Prime Ministers of Greece and Israel (Georgios Papandreou and Benjamin Netanyahu) in the summer of 2010 served as the catalyst for the upgrade of bilateral relations between the two countries<sup>36</sup>. The Greek Prime Minister's visit to Israel (in July 2010) was the first of its kind in three decades<sup>37</sup>. Following this, the Israeli Prime Minister reciprocated the visit to Athens in August of the same year, which was also the first visit of an Israeli Prime Minister to Greece<sup>38</sup>. As a result of these visits and the policy decisions made by the representatives of both countries, relations between Greece and Israel warmed and laid the foundation for future agreements and collaborations in multiple areas, including the economy, energy, tourism industry, and military cooperation<sup>39</sup>.

Nevertheless, the substantive reasons for the warming of relations between Greece and Israel can be attributed, on the one hand, to the breakdown of diplomatic relations between Turkey and Israel and, on the other hand, to the desire to create a strong regional alliance as a means of external balance in the broader Eastern Mediterranean region<sup>40,41,42,43</sup>. Furthermore, the United States, with the primary goal of maintaining its influence in the Eastern Mediterranean without bearing the burden of costly military intervention, sought ways to combine security with a limited presence of regional powers that might threaten the existing order in the region<sup>44</sup>. The geopolitical landscape in the Eastern Mediterranean has indeed undergone significant shifts, and the strategic interests of various actors have led to the development of new alliances and partnerships, with Greece and Israel playing increasingly important roles in this evolving regional dynamic<sup>45</sup>. Finally, in this context, the United States recognizes the increasing instability that Turkish hegemony brings to the region, and in response is developing strategic security ties with Greece, including investments in ports and military bases in the region, while encouraging Athens to take an active role in regional security, while having Israel's security as their top priority<sup>46</sup>.

### **III. Agreements and Collaborations between Greece and Israel (2010 -2022)**

The improvement of relations between the two countries in recent decades has been a significant pillar for advancing common interests in various areas and reflects the shared goal of stability, security, and prosperity in the Eastern Mediterranean region<sup>47</sup>. One of the key areas of cooperation is in the energy sector<sup>48</sup>. In 2010, the idea of potential energy cooperation was raised by Israel during the visit of the then Greek Prime Minister, Georgios Papandreou<sup>49</sup>. This idea envisioned the development of energy relations between the two countries, with the aim of utilizing natural resources in the region and forming a strategic energy partnership<sup>50</sup>. Real progress on this matter began in 2012 when the first trilateral meeting between the Prime Ministers of Greece, Cyprus, and Israel took place. During this meeting, discussions were held regarding the joint creation of working groups to explore possibilities for cooperation in the energy sector. The goals included enhancing

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<sup>36</sup> Stergiou, (2015) p. 421

<sup>37</sup> Eliezer, B. (2011). "Greece - Israel: From Indifference to Cooperation." *Epalxeis* No. 98, p. 46-49.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid

<sup>39</sup> Ibid

<sup>40</sup> Broumas, V. (2020). "Strategic Relations of Greece and Turkey with Israel." *Aeronautical Review* No. 118, p. 68.

<sup>41</sup> Marangos, J., *The Internal Impact and External Influence of the Greek Financial Crisis*, Palgrave 59 Macmillan, 2017, σ. 101 - 123.

<sup>42</sup> Stampoulis, P., 'The Geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean,' Center for International Strategic Analyses 60 Analyses, Research Paper No. 3, Athens, 2017, p. 9

<sup>43</sup> Broumas, (2020) p.82

<sup>44</sup> Yegin, M., United States Policy in the Eastern Mediterranean. *Comparative Southeast European Studies*, 70(3), 2022, p. 441

<sup>45</sup> Ibid

<sup>46</sup> Ibid

<sup>47</sup> Tziampiris, (2015) p.46

<sup>48</sup> Tziarras, Z., "Israel - Cyprus - Greece: A Comfortable Quasi - Alliance", *Mediterranean 86 Politics*, Vol21, Issue 3, 2016, p. 41.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid

<sup>50</sup> Adamides, C., & Christou, O., Energy security and the transformation of regional securitization relations in the Eastern Mediterranean. In S. Katsikides & P.I. Koktsidis (Eds.), *Societies in Transition: Economic, Political and Security Transformations in Contemporary Europe*, Cham, Heidelberg, New York, Dordrecht, London: Springer, 2015, p. 189

energy security, developing infrastructure, and exporting energy to Europe<sup>51</sup>. Ultimately, this meeting led to the signing of the agreement for the creation of the "EastMed" energy corridor on January 2, 2020, in Athens<sup>52</sup>.

In addition, in 2013, a trilateral intergovernmental Memorandum of Understanding<sup>53</sup> (MOU) was signed for the Euro-Asian Electricity Interconnector, with the aim of transferring electric energy to Europe<sup>54,55</sup>. This MOU represents the pinnacle of cooperation between the three countries, promoting the joint utilization of energy sources and water resources<sup>56</sup>. Through this significant project, electric energy will be transported from Israel, through Cyprus, Crete, and the Peloponnese, to Europe, creating a reliable interconnection that will enhance the energy security of the region's countries and contribute to their political and economic development<sup>57</sup>. Furthermore, there is a highly significant military cooperation between Greece and Israel with the purpose of promoting regional security<sup>58</sup>. In 2011, the Common Strategic Framework (CSF) was signed between the two countries, which included joint training exercises of their air forces. This framework was subsequently updated in 2012 and 2013<sup>59,60</sup>. Also, in 2016, an agreement was signed regarding the cooperation and co-training regime of the military forces, which is renewed annually thereafter and includes<sup>61</sup>:

- Joint aviation exercises and co-training of (fighter) pilots from air forces, aimed at improving aviation capabilities.
- Cooperation in the field of information, including the exchange of information and the coordination of actions for security and threat mitigation.
- Cooperation in the field of cyber warfare, involving the development and protection of cyber security and cyber attacks.
- Cooperation between the defence industries of the two countries in the field of aircraft material manufacturing, thus offering opportunities for joint defence investments and collaborations.

Regarding economic and trade policies, both countries recognize the strategic importance of strengthening economic ties and trade transactions between them<sup>62</sup>. Since 2010 and onwards, significant bilateral visits of high-ranking officials and political figures have taken place between the two countries, which have enhanced dialogue and cooperation in these areas. Greece and Israel, with the warm support of the United States, have strengthened their investment relationships, promoting mutual investment in various sectors such as the tourism industry, maritime services, renewable energy sources, and technology. They have cooperated and exchanged expertise in the field of drilling and the extraction of natural gas and oil. Collaborations and transactions have also taken place in the fields of agriculture, biotechnology, and the pharmaceutical industry<sup>63,64</sup>.

During the visit of the Prime Minister of Greece, Antonis Samaras, to Israel in 2013, significant bilateral agreements were signed to solidify economic cooperation and promote innovative investments<sup>65</sup>. Specifically, a bilateral agreement on economic development and new technologies was signed with the aim of facilitating investment processes and establishing a framework for the innovation ecosystem. This included a memorandum of cooperation with YOZMA, Israel's largest fund, to attract joint Greek-Israeli capital for

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<sup>51</sup>Tziarras, (2016) p. 41.

<sup>52</sup>Mazis, I., &Sgouros, A., *Geopolitical Analysis in the Energy Complex of the Eastern Mediterranean*, 2020, p. 41

<sup>53</sup><https://embassies.gov.il/athens/Relations/agreements/Pages/memorandum-of-understanding-minedugr-jewishmuseum-yadvashem-2017.aspx#p>

<sup>54</sup>Stampolis, K. &Mezartasoglou, D., *Greece's Energy Security and Proposals for Improvement*, IENE, Athens, 2018, p. 84

<sup>55</sup>Indeo, F., *The Levant Energy Basin: a Geopolitical Game Changer in the Eastern Mediterranean?*, 2016, p. 17 - 18.

<sup>56</sup>Tziarras, (2016)p. 41.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid

<sup>58</sup>Pemunta, N. &Tabenyang, T. *The Paradox of Petrodollar Development: Chad's Military Diplomacy in Regional and Global Security*. *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 2016, p. 390.

<sup>59</sup> Research Institute for European and American Studies, *Greek-Israeli-Cyprus Military and Security Relations: A Preview*, 15.12.2013. <https://www.rieas.gr/researchareas/2014-07-30-08-58-27/greek-israel-studies/2077-greek-israeli-cyprus-military-and-security-relations-a-preview>

<sup>60</sup>Vlassis, S., '337 Squadron in Israel,' *DouriosIppos* No. 9, Athens, 2011, p. 72-75

<sup>61</sup> ANA – MPA, 2017

<sup>62</sup> Annual Report 2019 from the Economic and Commercial Office in Tel Aviv, 2020, p. 33.

<sup>63</sup> Eliezer, (2020), p. 25 - 26

<sup>64</sup><https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EL/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX%3A22000A0621%2801%29>

<sup>65</sup> Ibid

investment in Greek innovative enterprises<sup>66</sup>. Other economic agreements between Greece and Israel included the Film Co-Production Agreement<sup>67</sup>, which was implemented on October 8, 2013, to strengthen cooperation in the film industry and create joint films. Additionally, the Memorandum of Understanding on the Reduction of International Service Duties, signed on May 7, 2017, aimed to reduce duties on international service imports between the two countries. There was also an agreement for cooperation between "Invest in Greece" and "Invest in Israel" to promote and facilitate investments in start-ups and innovative programs in Greece by Israeli companies and investors<sup>68</sup>. Notably, in March 2018, the Israel-Greece Chamber of Commerce was established with the goal of expanding and deepening economic and trade relations, facilitating transactions between businesses in both countries, and promoting investments and the exchange of goods and services<sup>69</sup>. In 2016, a mentoring program for young Greek entrepreneurs was launched in collaboration with experts from the Association of Advanced Technology Industries in Israel<sup>70</sup>. Additionally, in the same year, an agreement on maritime transportation sought to transform Greece's central ports into transshipment hubs<sup>71</sup>.

Regarding Israeli investments in Greece, Israeli businesses have focused on various sectors, including the management and processing of liquid and solid waste, energy, information technology, new technologies, tourism, and especially real estate<sup>72</sup>. According to a study by the Bank of Greece for 2022, direct foreign investments (DFI) from Israel to Greece amounted to 98 million euros<sup>73</sup>. This represents an increase of approximately 85% compared to the data from 2021 and a significant 308% increase compared to 2018 when direct foreign investments from Israel were valued at 24 million euros<sup>74</sup>. At the same time, in 2022, exports from Israel to Greece increased to \$670.3 million compared to \$442.6 million in 2019, while imports from Greece increased from \$321.2 million in 2019 to \$587 million in 2022<sup>75</sup>. In January 2022, Tikkun Europe, a subsidiary of TikkunOlam based in Israel, inaugurated a medical cannabis processing facility in Corinth, Greece, highlighting the growth of cooperation between the two countries<sup>76</sup>. Finally, in the summer of 2022, Greece and Israel signed a memorandum of understanding for cooperation in the field of civil protection, aiming to improve the exchange of information, joint training, and mutual support in cases of natural disasters, climate change impacts, or other risk situations that may affect both countries<sup>77</sup>.

#### **IV. Greece – Israel: Tourism Policy**

In this context, cooperation between Greece and Israel in the tourism sector has seen significant development in recent years. Both countries recognize the importance of tourism as a sector that contributes to economic prosperity and promotes their cultural assets. Collaboration in the tourism sector includes the exchange of cultural events, tourism packages, and promotional campaigns<sup>78</sup>. As early as 2010, the two countries expressed their intention to enhance the promotion of tourism activities, tourism exchanges, and the creation of mutually beneficial tourism packages to attract more visitors<sup>79</sup>. Measures have also been discussed to create the necessary infrastructure that would facilitate tourism activities and the exchange of information and expertise regarding tourist preferences and the tourism products they offer.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid

<sup>67</sup> [https://www.kodiko.gr/nomologia/download\\_fek?f=fek/2020/a/fek\\_a\\_172\\_2020.pdf&t=167b8a66dc98ea0fdd9ea08dfde91dc2](https://www.kodiko.gr/nomologia/download_fek?f=fek/2020/a/fek_a_172_2020.pdf&t=167b8a66dc98ea0fdd9ea08dfde91dc2)

<sup>68</sup> Ibid

<sup>69</sup> Ibid

<sup>70</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Department B3, Information Note on Greece - Israel Economic and Trade Relations, 127 Athens, 2016, p. 2

<sup>71</sup> Ibid

<sup>72</sup> Annual Report 2020 from the Economic and Commercial Office in Tel Aviv, 2021, p. 25

<sup>73</sup> Economic Profile of Israel 2022 from the Economic and Commercial Office in Tel Aviv, 2023, p. 40

<sup>74</sup> Ibid

<sup>75</sup> Economic Profile of Israel 2022 from the Economic and Commercial Office in Tel Aviv, 2023, p. 40

<sup>76</sup> Ibid

<sup>77</sup> Greece - Israel: They signed the first Memorandum of Cooperation in the field of Civil Protection. Kathimerini, June 14, 2022 <https://www.kathimerini.gr/society/561908476/ellada-israil-ypegripsan-to-protomnimonio-synergiasias-ston-tomea-tis-politikis-prostasias/>

<sup>78</sup> Annual Report 2022 from the Economic and Commercial Office in Tel Aviv, 2023, p. 47

<sup>79</sup> George Papandreou-Benjamin Netanyahu: Decided cooperation in defense and security. To Vima, August 16, 2010. <https://www.tovima.gr/2010/08/16/politics/b-giwrgos-papandreoy-beniamin-netaniaxoy-b-br-apofasisan-synergasia-se-amyna-kai-asfaleia/>

In the same direction, on August 19, 2011, an Air Transport Agreement<sup>80</sup> was signed with the aim of facilitating and improving air connections between Greece and Israel, increasing flights and enhancing services for passengers. In addition, during the visit of the Prime Minister of Greece, Antonis Samaras, to Israel in 2013, a bilateral tourism cooperation agreement was signed to facilitate access procedures for tourists to both countries<sup>81</sup>. In early 2016, during the bilateral convergence of the 2nd Supreme Cooperation Council of Greece and Israel in Jerusalem, a Joint Declaration on Cooperation in the Tourism Sector was signed<sup>82</sup>. Also, on March 13, 2017, an Agreement on Maritime Transport<sup>83</sup> was signed to strengthen maritime connections, improve maritime cooperation and facilitate the transport of goods and passengers.

Additionally, in 2017 and 2019, significant efforts were made by Greece to promote and showcase Greek tourism at the International Mediterranean Tourism Market (IMTM) held in Tel Aviv<sup>84,85</sup>. Subsequently, in 2020, during the official visit of the Greek delegation to Israel, a joint statement of the two countries was signed to continue bilateral negotiations with the aim of reaching a Tourism Agreement as soon as possible<sup>86</sup>. The existing Agreement, originally signed in 1980<sup>87</sup>, marked a significant step towards strengthening and promoting institutional cooperation in the field of tourism between Greece and Israel. Thus, in 2021, the two countries agreed on an expanded, more systematic, and closer cooperation in the tourism sector with five-year duration and the possibility of automatic renewal<sup>88,89\*</sup>.

At the signing of the agreement, both countries committed to institutional cooperation between their National Tourism Authorities. They also agreed to exchange information and knowledge related to tourism investments, tourism innovations, digitalization, tourism education, and professional training. Additionally, there was an emphasis on strengthening entrepreneurship in the tourism sector and coordinating the participation of both countries in international tourism organizations. Cooperation between travel agencies and other tourism entities was promoted, as well as the exchange of information regarding tourism statistics and legislation. Furthermore, in 2021, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, an agreement was reached for a "green passport" in tourism to facilitate travel for Israeli citizens in preparation for the tourism season, allowing them to visit Greece without restrictions and mandatory quarantine<sup>90</sup>. Finally, in 2022, Greece made its presence felt at the International Mediterranean Tourism Market (IMTM) 2022, leading to a mutual agreement to enhance tourism flows in both directions and promote cruise tourism and alternative forms of tourism<sup>91</sup>.

## V. Tourist flows from Israel to Greece in recent years

### Total estimate of the time period from 2016 to 2022

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<sup>80</sup>[https://www.kodiko.gr/nomologia/download\\_fek?f=fek/2011/a/fek\\_a\\_129\\_2011.pdf&t=3386af9f80fbeb3024108d5278497c61](https://www.kodiko.gr/nomologia/download_fek?f=fek/2011/a/fek_a_129_2011.pdf&t=3386af9f80fbeb3024108d5278497c61)

<sup>81</sup> Eliezer, (2020), p. 28.

<sup>82</sup> Annual Report 2019 from the Economic and Commercial Office in Tel Aviv, 2020, p. 74 [Contract No. 6655]

<sup>83</sup>[https://www.kodiko.gr/nomologia/download\\_fek?f=fek/2020/a/fek\\_a\\_190\\_2020.pdf&t=71d0b17f8b92602a4b12c17ca58a68e7](https://www.kodiko.gr/nomologia/download_fek?f=fek/2020/a/fek_a_190_2020.pdf&t=71d0b17f8b92602a4b12c17ca58a68e7)

<sup>84</sup> Meeting of the Minister of Tourism, Elena Kountoura, with Patriarch Theophilos III of Jerusalem regarding the priority of developing religious tourism. Ministry of Tourism. February 10, 2017. <https://mintour.gov.gr/synantisi-tis-ytoyrgoy-toyris moy-kas-elenas-koyntoyra-me-ton-patriarchi-ierosolymon-k-k-theofilo-g-gia-tin-proteraiotita-stin-anaptyxi-toy-thriskyetikoy-toyris moy/>

<sup>85</sup> Minister of Tourism Elena Kountoura at Innovate Israel in Tel Aviv to promote tourism cooperation between Greece and Israel through innovation and technology. Ministry of Tourism. February 14, 2019. <https://mintour.gov.gr/i-ytoyrgos-toyris moy-elena-koyntoyra-sto-innovateisrael-sto-tel-aviv-gia-tin-prothisi-tis-toyristikis-synergias-metaxy-elladas-israil-meso-tis-kainotomias-kai-tis-technologias/>

<sup>86</sup><https://www.enterprisegreece.gov.gr/extroversion-strategy-2021/GR/files/assets/common/downloads/Ethniko-Stratigiko-Sxedio-Exostrefeias-2021.pdf?uni=e96db6daaa0933dd09fa9e6e11f4aaac>

<sup>87</sup><https://mfa.gov.il/Style%20Library/AmanotPdf/4-15795-1392.pdf>

<sup>88</sup> Minister of Tourism HarisTheocharis signed an agreement between Greece and Israel for strategic cooperation in tourism. Ministry of Tourism. February 8, 2021. <https://mintour.gov.gr/symfonia-elladas-israil-gia-ti-stratigiki-synergasia-ston-toyris moy-ypegrapse-o-ytoyrgos-toyris moy-k-charis-theocharis/>

<sup>89</sup>\*The agreement has not yet been ratified by the Greek parliament.

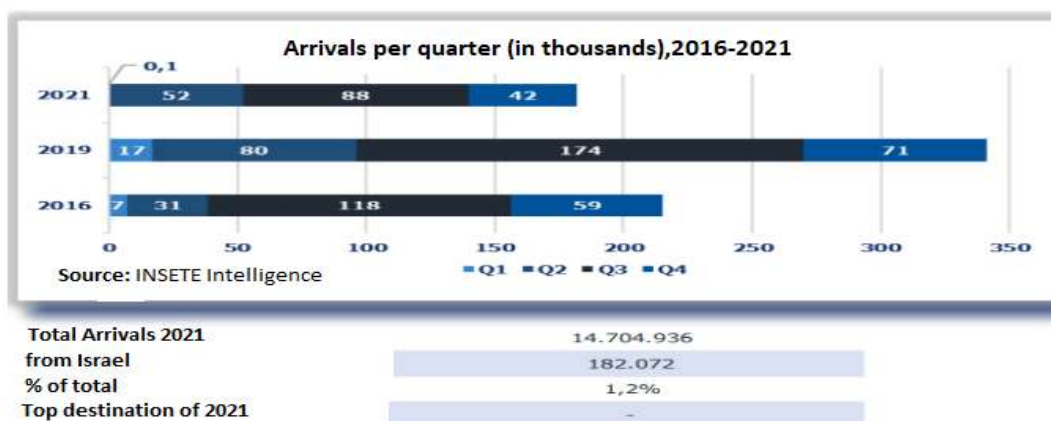
<sup>90</sup> Israel: Agreement on a 'green passport' for tourism. Euronews. September 2, 2021. <https://gr.euronews.com/2021/02/08/mitsotakis-sto-israh-shmantikh-h-metaxu-mas-strathgikh-synergasia>

<sup>91</sup> Minister of Tourism HarisTheocharis signed an agreement between Greece and Israel for strategic cooperation in tourism. Ministry of Tourism. February 8, 2021. <https://mintour.gov.gr/symfonia-elladas-israil-gia-ti-stratigiki-synergasia-ston-toyris moy-ypegrapse-o-ytoyrgos-toyris moy-k-charis-theocharis/>

Based on the statistical data from the Association of Greek Tourism Enterprises (SETE), tourist flows from Israel to Greece over the last decade have exhibited fluctuations<sup>92</sup>. However, the year 2016 marked the beginning of a continuous increase in the percentages of Israeli tourists visiting the country. Starting from 2016, these percentages continued to rise, with exceptions in 2020 and 2021, where there was a general decline in the tourism sector due to the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>93</sup>. In an overall assessment of the period from 2016 to 2022, according to statistical data from the Central Bureau of Statistics<sup>94,95</sup>, it is noted that from 2016 to 2019, the percentage of Israeli tourist arrivals in Greece increased by 58.8%. In contrast, from 2019 to 2021, there was a 46.7% decrease due to the pandemic. According to SETE, in 2022, approximately 27.8 million tourists visited Greece, out of which 489,825 were Israeli, a number representing to 1.8% share of the total market. This percentage is significantly higher compared to those of the last decade<sup>96</sup>. Furthermore, based on SETE statistics, there was a 169% increase compared to 2021 (a year that saw a decrease in incoming tourism flows due to the pandemic).

In general terms, as seen in the Tables provided (**Table 1 & 2**), tourist arrivals in Greece from Israel have followed a steady upward trend since 2016, with peaks in the third quarter of each year. However, there was a significant decrease in 2020 due to the global COVID-19 pandemic compared to previous years. In 2020, tourism flows between Israel and Greece were essentially suspended due to the restrictive measures imposed as a result of the pandemic. For most months of the year, there were no direct flights between the two countries, leading to a significant reduction in tourist visits. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that during the period from June to September 2020, there was a strong interest among Israeli travellers in visiting Greece for summer vacations, despite the strict requirements in place, such as the need for a negative PCR test and the completion of the Passenger Locator Form (PLF)<sup>97</sup>. Although tourism flows between the two countries were significantly affected, the acceptance of restrictive measures and adaptation to the new conditions were indicative of the interest of Israeli travellers in returning to Greece, as was evident in 2022 when the number of arrivals increased by 43.5%, as shown by the recorded data from 2019, i.e., the pre-pandemic era.

**Table 1.** Arrivals of Israeli tourists per quarter, 2016-2021



**Table 2.** Arrivals of Israeli tourists per quarter, 2019-2022

<sup>92</sup><https://insete.gr/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/20-10-Israel-2005-2018.pdf>

<sup>93</sup><https://insete.gr/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/22-09-Israel-2016-2021.pdf>

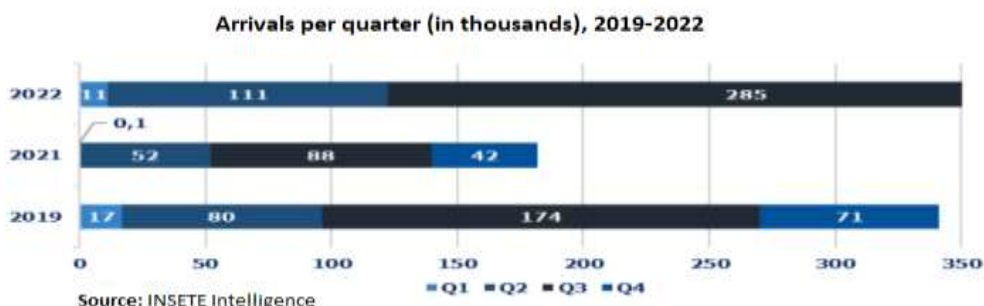
<sup>94</sup><https://insete.gr/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/23-9-IL.pdf>

<sup>95</sup><https://insete.gr/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/23-06-Tourism-and-Greek-Economy-2021-2022-v1.pdf>

<sup>96</sup><https://insete.gr/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/20-10-Israel-2005-2018.pdf>

<sup>97</sup> Ibid

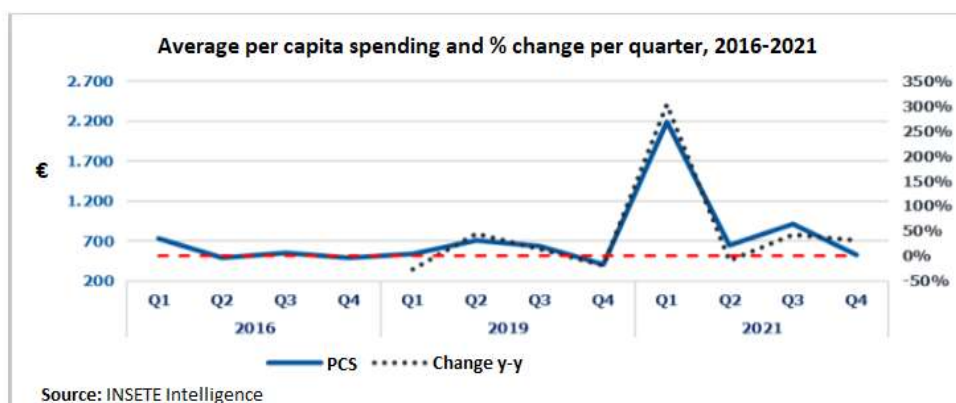




Total Arrivals 2022	27,835,541
from Israel	489,825
% of total	1,8%
Top-3 destinations of 2022	-

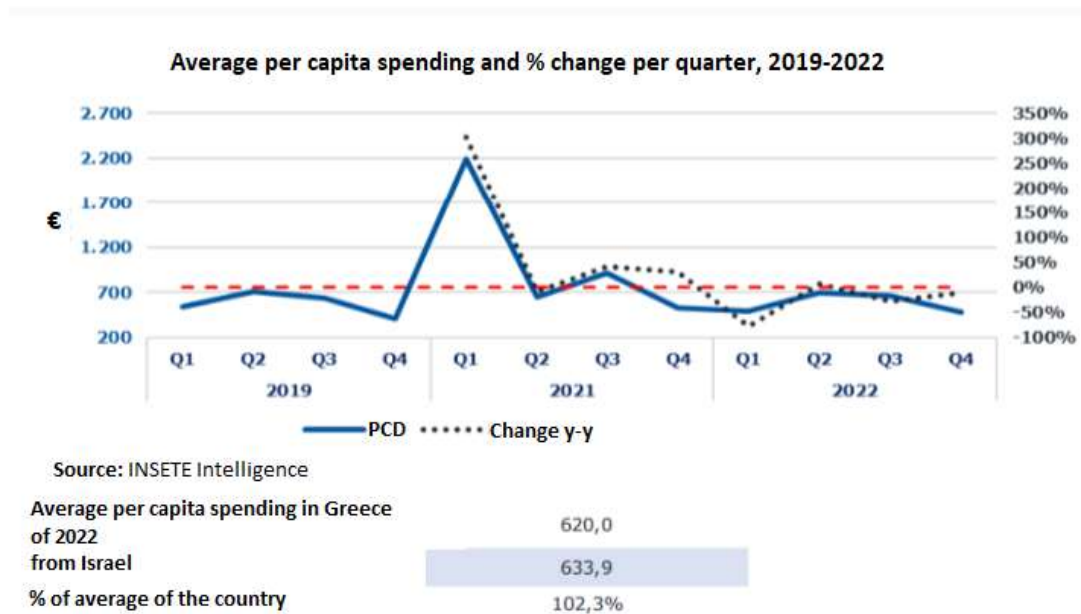
In **Tables 3&4**, the statistical data pertain to the monetary expenditures made by tourists from Israel during the period from 2016 to 2022 and shows changes in per capita spending. Specifically, from 2016 to 2019, the per capita spending of Israeli tourists increased by 12.3%. This means that over the three-year period, each Israeli tourist individually spent an average of 12.3% more money on their trip to Greece compared to previous years. This is mainly attributed to the higher number of overnight stays and the longer average length of stay in the country. From 2019 to 2021, there was an additional increase of approximately 24.5%. It's noteworthy that in 2021, the per capita spending of Israeli tourists was 6.7% higher compared to the average spending of tourists from other countries who visited Greece during the same period. Regarding the year 2022, the increase reached 5.3% compared to 2019, and it was 2.3% higher compared to the country's average. This implies that tourists from Israel have increased their expenditures in Greece in recent years, which has a positive impact on the country's tourism industry.

**Table 3.** Average per capita spending and % change per quarter, 2016-2021



Average per capita spending in Greece of 2021	702,4
from Israel	749,5
% of average of the country	106,7%

**Table 4.** Average per capita spending and % change per quarter, 2019-2022



## VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, Greece has managed to establish itself as a significant and reliable tourist destination for Israeli travellers. A cornerstone in this achievement was the intergovernmental cooperation between Greece and Israel, which coincided with the shifting geopolitical dynamics in the south-eastern Mediterranean region and the convergence of mutual interests. Consequently, the strengthening of diplomatic relations and mutually beneficial cooperation between Greece and Israel in various sectors, as evidenced in this study, created the necessary conditions for the growth of Israeli tourism in Greece. As a result, improved tourism infrastructure, safety, accessibility, increased availability of air and sea connections between the two countries and other factors have made travel more comfortable and less complicated. The continuous increase in tourism from Israel to Greece, beyond the mutual economic benefit, opens up prospects for further comprehensive approaches and cooperation between the two nations.

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