

And they call it puppy love!

VALENTINE'S DAY may have passed, but love was in the air in Parliament on Tuesday when a British male and an Israeli female hooked up, *writes Stephen Oryszczuk*.

In a "ground-breaking" first visit to the UK following the relaxation of quarantine laws, an adorable Israeli guide dog called Dinka caught the eye of Cosby, a black curly-haired labrador belonging to David Blunkett MP.

Under former rules, Cosby and Dinka may never have met. Before the EU changes were implemented by the UK in November 2012, dogs were quarantined for six months before entering the UK.

"They were getting extremely well," said Marc Green, director of British Friends of Israel Guide Dog Centre for the Blind. "So well, in fact, that I thought there was a *shidduch* going on! I was about to get my coat!"

Dinka's Chicago-born owner Bracha ben Avraham, a 62-year-old grandmother of three who made aliyah 40 years ago, happily confirmed Cosby's credentials.

"He's a phenomenal dog," gushed Bracha. "I reached out and put my hand on him and I was amazed, he's about twice the size of my dog! He must be 40 kilos at least."

Following what some were calling 'Cosby's blind date', Bracha was quick to confirm Dinka's pedigree, saying of the two-year-old cross-breed: "She's dynamic, enthusiastic and intelligent, with a phenomenal memory for routes. All she needs to do is go some place once and that's it, she's got it committed to memory. She's got a little GPS in her head."

While Dinka and Cosby were getting acquainted, Bracha and the team from British Friends met Blunkett. The former home secretary is a patron of the Israeli charity, having previously visited the centre in Beit Oved near Tel Aviv.

"I was very pleased to meet Bracha



Photo: John Riffkin

Dinka (left) caught the eye of David Blunkett's black labrador Cosby

and Dinka," said Blunkett afterwards. "I have taken up the cudgel on behalf of those wanting to bring their dog to the UK, and this was an opportunity to celebrate the change in regulations which allowed her to bring her dog into the UK from Israel."

"He knows this is a ground-breaking trip and that we're treading on new territory here," said Bracha. "No guide dog team from Israel has done this before. We followed all the DEFRA rules but Israel is an unlisted country so it wasn't straight-forward

at all," she said.

"There were mountains of paperwork and lots of injections, but it was a major breakthrough, the culmination of five or six years' worth of lobbying," added Green.

After their parliamentary romance, it is unclear whether Cosby and Dinka will meet again, but some analysts suggested that the politician's British companion may think twice if he knew how expensive Israeli females can be. Guide dogs like Dinka cost up to £20,000 over their lifetime.