



Mekorot-Vitens – What went wrong under the magnifying glass?

Over the last few days we have seen many reports about the cancellation of a cooperation agreement between Dutch water company Vitens and Israeli water company Mekorot.

In the frenzy of taking decisions based on pressure by parties with a very clear agenda, basic facts were missing or ignored.

What is the reality when it comes to Israel's national water company, Mekorot? Mekorot is one of the world's most technologically advanced water companies, a world leader in desalination, water reclamation, water project engineering, water safety and water quality. Mekorot is a well appreciated partner in the region and in the world. Therefore, the decision by Vitens to cancel its agreement with Mekorot was contrary to any logic.

Here are some facts which testify to the absurdity of the decision which was taken - Mekorot supplies water to the Palestinian Authority, as well as the settlements, according to the water agreement in the interim agreement signed in 1995 between Israel and the Palestinians. In the past few years, Israel has transferred 52-53 MCM of water per year to the Palestinians, including about 5 MCM to Gaza. In total the quantities **over 22 MCM more water than it is obliged** to transfer according to the agreement. Recently, Israel has increased the quantity of water transferred to the Palestinians by a further 4 MCM within the framework of the Blair-Kerry plan and the resumption of the peace process. Mekorot is not only involved in supplying water to the Palestinians, over the last three years Mekorot has provided training courses to Palestinians and Jordanians within the regional organization MEDRC. The last such course that it provided was actually funded by the Dutch Foreign Ministry, with the Dutch Ambassador attending the course opening ceremony as a guest of honor. Throughout the years since the water agreement was signed, the cooperation according to it has always been upheld, even during difficult times such as the years of Intifada and Palestinian violence. Israel has always insured that the supply of water and the cooperation in this field is separated from the political issues and the conflict. Mekorot is also a key participant in the, by the World Bank supported, Red Sea - Dead Sea project, that has just recently been signed by Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian authority, to the benefit of all sides. So, while Mekorot is welcomed as an important partner by the Palestinians, the Jordanians, MEDRC, the World Bank and many other international companies, this is not the case with Vitens. Vitens' spokesperson was quoted in saying that the pressure regarding the agreement with Mekorot caused them to look at the company with a magnifying glass, this magnifying glass was obviously rather blurry.

These are facts that the BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) supporters will not put forth while pushing for boycotting an Israeli company, they don't want people to be confused with the facts, it may interfere with their mission. Their mission unfortunately has nothing to do with encouraging cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians, and everything to do with undermining such cooperation.

Such was the unfortunate case of the cancelling of a planned involvement of the Dutch company Royal

Haskoning in the Kidron project, a wastewater treatment plan in east Jerusalem, intended for the promotion of health and sanitation of the Palestinian residents. The cancellation did nothing to promote any noble cause; on the contrary, it was a statement that the Palestinians' well-being is not important enough. Otherwise, if one has the Palestinians' interests at heart, one should push for this and many other such projects to materialize, the sooner the better.

These companies were provided with ill advice, which expresses a biased, unbalanced and even hostile approach towards Israel. The message of such advice and decisions is that of undermining regional cooperation and measures that will assist in leading to further cooperation between Israel and the Palestinians.

On a positive note, the recent and very successful visit of Prime Minister Rutte and the two government ministers to Israel, contrary to the media portrayal of the visit, has proven that Israel and the Netherlands continue to share many mutual interests, and that there is a will on both sides to further deepen and expand the relations which have always been very close and warm. We are confident that this is the direction that the relations will take.

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