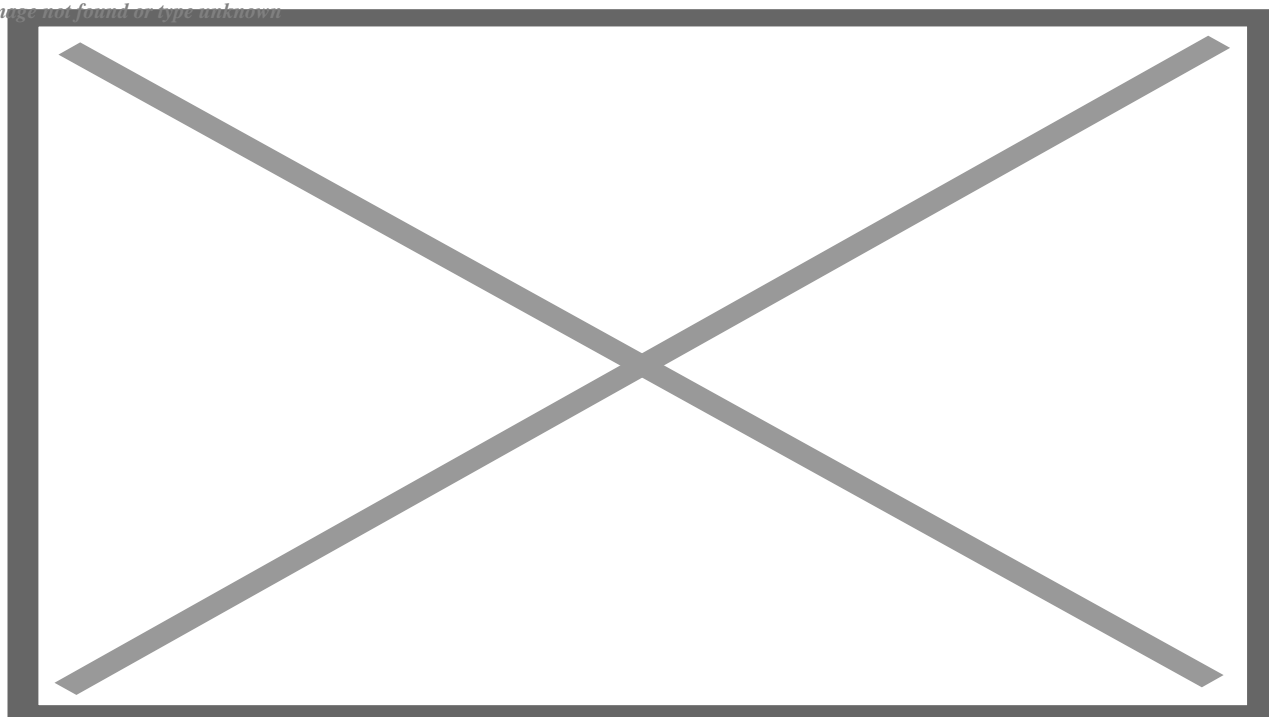


Italian company under fire for inking deal with Israeli firm

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Rome, February 10 (RHC)-- An accord sealed in early January between the Italian multi-utility company Iren and Israel's national water carrier Mekorot has triggered protests in a number of Italian cities. As a multi-utility firm Iren - which operates solely in Italy's northern regions - provides services related to gas, electricity and water.

The company's four major shareholders are the municipalities of Genoa, Turin, Parma and Reggio Emilia. On Tuesday, a council meeting held in the north-western city of Genoa ended up in chaos, with some opposition councilors staging a protest against the Iren-Mekorot deal.

Over the past years, companies in a number of countries including Portugal, Argentina and the Netherlands have pulled out of deals signed with Mekorot. The decision to sever ties with Israel's water

company followed protests over Mekerot's role in Tel Aviv's water apartheid against Palestinians.

Israel's Mekorot provides 90 percent of drinking water for Israeli settlers and infrastructure for water supplies in the illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. Not only Israel is accused of manipulating water supplies but it also prohibits the construction of water networks to provide drinking water in cities and villages. Humanitarian organizations accuse Israel of violating Palestinians' rights included in several international agreements and conventions.

It is estimated that while the Palestinian population of the West Bank has doubled since the Israeli occupation formally began in 1967, water allocation for Palestinians has remained at 1997 levels. It's not just the Genoa's councilors who are calling on their municipality to scrap the Iren-Mekorot deal. Councilors from the municipalities of Reggio Emilia, Turin and Parma have demanded their governments to do the same.

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