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# Doing Business In Israel



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The State of Israel is a small, parliamentary democracy of 9 million people, situated on the southeastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea and northern shore of the Red Sea. The major urban centers are the capital, Jerusalem with a population of approximately 901,000 people, the metropolitan area of Tel Aviv with 3,854,000 and Haifa with 281,000.

Important industries are software, telecommunications, hi-tech, bio-tech, tourism, precision instruments, chemicals, pharmaceuticals and textiles.

Until recently, Israel's natural resources were limited to potash, phosphates, bromine and salts, found in the Dead Sea area. In the last few years, Israel has begun developing off-shore gas fields such as the Tamar and Leviathan Fields, and it is expected that the country has enough gas reserves to be a net energy exporter for many years to come.

#### Free Trade Agreements

Israel has signed free trade agreements with the European Union, the USA and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). Israel has also signed free trade agreements with individual countries including: Canada, Mexico, Turkey and Jordan.

#### Israel-European Union Free Trade Agreement

In 1975, Israel and the EU signed an agreement providing for the establishment of a Free Trade Area for industrial and some agricultural products. According to the agreement, and subject to rules of origin, Israel's industrial exports to the EU are exempt from customs duties and other import restrictions. Israel has eliminated all duties on industrial imports from the EU.

#### Israel-USA Free Trade Agreement

Israel and the USA signed a Free Trade Agreement which was fully implemented on January 1, 1995. The agreement, subject to rules of origin (which are different from those of the EU agreement), eliminates all import duties and trade restrictions between the two countries.

#### Israel-OECD Membership

On May 2010, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) accepted Israel as a full member in the organization.

## Land

The Israel Lands Administration (ILA) is responsible for managing land owned by the State of Israel, Keren Kayemet Le'Yisrael (Jewish National Fund, KKL), and Rashut Pituach (Development Authority), comprising 93% of the land in Israel. Land managed by the ILA is considered to be State-Owned and is generally sold or leased on the basis of issuing tenders.

For most enterprises, a company is the preferred way of doing business in Israel.

A company generally has limited liability, where the company may be sued to the extent of its capital and resources. It is possible to be self-employed or to form a partnership or limited partnership under Israeli or foreign law.

Limited partnerships usually enable foreign individual investors to credit Israeli taxes (or utilize any Israeli losses) for tax purposes in their home country.

#### *Subsidiary of a non-Israeli company*

In the past, many Israeli hi-tech companies were formed as subsidiaries of a US (or other foreign) parent corporation in order to avoid Israeli capital gains tax upon any exit at rates of up to 50%.

Israel now offers passive foreign investors exemption from capital gains tax in most cases upon exit - see below.

Furthermore, the use of a US parent corporation is particularly problematic as the US may tax undistributed profits under complex provisions in Subpart F of the US Internal Revenue Code.

An Israeli company may enjoy tax breaks on its profits - see below.

It is possible to operate a business operation in Israel as a branch of a foreign corporation. In this way, it may be possible to avoid dividend withholding tax (up to 25%) in most cases, but company tax (see below) will still be payable on Israeli source profits. The Israeli Tax Authority may request to see the overseas accounting records of the foreign corporation to check how much income and expenses are allocable to its Israeli branch for company tax purposes. US investors occasionally use US LLCs with no other activity to conduct Israeli operations that do not qualify for Israeli tax breaks.

Most Israeli businesses tend to be conducted by an Israeli company as this is easier when dealing with Israeli suppliers, customers and banks.

#### *Dual listings*

The Securities Law enables Israeli companies traded on foreign exchanges to dual-list, and it empowers the Israel Securities Authority to allow foreign companies traded in U.S. markets to dual-list under the law as well.

The Securities Law enables companies to list easily and at almost no cost, and offers many benefits for U.S. traded companies, their founders and investors, as well as for the Israeli securities industry.



Companies trading on the NASDAQ, New York Stock Exchange or London Stock Exchange for at least a year since their IPOs, or for less than a year if they maintain a market value exceeding \$150 million, are eligible to dual-list under the Securities Law.

*Incorporating in Israel and registering for tax purposes*

Companies may be either public or private. A private company must have at least one shareholder and one director. A public company is a company whose shares are traded on a stock exchange (in Israel or abroad) or have been offered to the public pursuant to a prospectus under the Securities Law and are held by the public. It usually takes 1-2 days to incorporate an Israeli company. A foreign company must be registered at the Israeli Companies Registry as a foreign company if it has a place of business or an office for share transfers in Israel.

Separate registrations of a new business in Israel are needed for:

(1) Income tax (2) Value Added Tax (3) payroll and other withholding taxes (4) national insurance (social security).

Non-residents are required to appoint an Israeli tax representative and VAT representative if any part of their activities is conducted in Israel. The tax representative is empowered to pay Israeli tax from the foreign resident's assets.

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The Israeli tax year normally corresponds with the calendar year. Subsidiaries of foreign publicly traded companies may sometimes be allowed to use a different fiscal year.

Companies are generally required to file audited annual tax returns and financial statements within five months of the end of their fiscal year, but extensions may be obtained. Israeli certified public accountants are usually allowed to spread the filing of the tax returns over a period of up to 13 months after the end of the tax year.

Companies must file monthly returns on account (bi-monthly sometimes if the business is small) accompanied by tax payments. The filings and payments are made by the 15<sup>th</sup> day after the end of the month at a local post office or bank. If a taxpayer is a few days late, a computer-generated penalty is usually issued.

Officially, account books and returns should be in Hebrew or Arabic, although English is usually accepted by most tax offices.

#### *Payments for expenses*

For most domestic Israeli expenses, withholding tax rates of up to 50% are prescribed unless the recipient has received confirmation from the Israeli Tax Authority allowing a lower rate. For remittances from Israel, the Israeli banks must withhold tax, generally at rates of 25%-31%, unless the remittances relate to imported goods. A withholding tax exemption or a reduced withholding rate may be obtained from the payor's tax office when a treaty applies or when the payments are for services that are rendered entirely abroad. Failure to withhold will result in a denial of the relevant expense and lead to possible penalties.

#### *Capital Gains*

With regard to capital gains, subject to any tax treaty, foreign residents are taxable on Israeli source "real" (inflation adjusted) capital gains at varying rates (individuals: 20-49%; companies: 25-31%). Foreign residents not doing business in Israel may enjoy an exemption from Israeli capital gains tax (tax only in the investor's home country) where:

- The investors reside in a country that had a tax treaty with Israel during the 10 years before their investment and report it within 30 days to the Israeli Tax Authority.
- Shares in a research-intensive company were issued to the foreign resident investor on or after January 1, 2003.
- Venture capital funds obtained an advance tax ruling from the Israeli tax authorities.
- Securities are traded on the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange.

- Securities of Israeli companies are traded on a recognized foreign stock exchange.
- Any applicable tax treaty (restricted to under 10% shareholders in the US-Israel tax treaty) provides so.



The Law for Encouragement of Capital Investments (the "Law") main goal is to increase the attractiveness of the Israeli economy in the face of international competition for investment and development. The Law promotes a more geographically balanced distribution of the population across the country and aims to strengthen the peripheral areas. The law includes two main schemes of government incentives: the grant scheme which allows up to 30% government grant on qualified investments for establishing or expanding an industrial enterprise in preferred areas; and the tax incentive scheme.

The Law applies to industrial enterprises which qualify as an "International Competitive Enterprise", which is defined as including industrial enterprises that own productive activities including: textiles, food, electronics, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, computer software, biotechnology, nanotechnologies, etc.

In order to meet the International Competitive Enterprise rule, 25% of the enterprise's revenues should be driven by exporting to large international markets.

The government grants scheme is affected by the location of the company's activities. Several regions in Israel have been declared National Priority Regions (Priority Area A), among them: Galilee, Jordan Valley, Negev region and Jerusalem (for hi-tech enterprises)

#### The Grant Scheme

An industrial enterprise located in "Priority Area A" fulfilling the terms of the Law, may be eligible for grants to be calculated as a percentage of the approved investment. The grants may be 20% of the actual investments of the enterprise for the follow assets:

- Buildings, machinery and other equipment (not including private vehicles) owned by the enterprise and used according to the approved program (by the Incentive Center).
- Expenses made for land development.
- Expenses made for renovation of the building.

The grant scheme is only applicable for enterprises located in Priority Area A. Enterprises from other areas do not qualify for the grant scheme, but may be entitled to tax benefits under the Law.

Enterprises complying with the requirements of the Law may benefit simultaneously from both the tax benefits (lower corporate tax rate) as well as applicable non-refundable grants (only relevant for Priority Area A).

#### The tax benefits scheme

Enterprises located in Priority Area A are eligible for a reduced corporate tax of 8% on all preferred income. Corporate tax rate on other regions is 12%.

### Preferred Enterprises

The tax benefits scheme will apply only to Preferred Income (as defined below) of a Preferred Enterprise. According to the law, a Preferred Enterprise is one of the following:

- Engaged mainly in biotechnology or nanotechnology, and has obtained the approval of the Head of Industrial R&D Administration;
- At least 25% of its Preferred Income was produced from exporting to international markets; or
- Engaged mainly in the field of renewable energy.

### Preferred Income

The Preferred Income is the gross income of a Preferred Enterprise (not including discounts) which was produced or which accrued during the course of business activities of the enterprise in Israel, as follows:

- Income from products manufactured in Israel, including components manufactured by subcontractors. Income derived from natural resources (gas, minerals, oil) would not be calculated as part of the Preferred Income.
- Income from the sale of semiconductors manufactured by independent subcontractors, as long as the IP belongs to the Preferred Enterprise.
- Income derived from royalties for the use, or the right to use, a patent or knowhow which was developed by the Preferred Enterprise.
- Income derived from industrial research and development made for a foreign resident, as long as an approval of the head of the R&D center has been provided.

### Tax Benefits

Preferred Enterprise is eligible for tax benefits for each tax year on which it has fulfilled a 25% export condition.

### Investments Incentives

Corporate Income Tax of a Preferred Enterprise is 7.5% if the enterprise is located in "Priority Area A", and 16% if it is located in other regions.

### Tourism Projects

The law for encouragement of capital investments also applies to tourism enterprises. "Tourism Enterprise" is defined as a tourism facility which includes at least 11 hotel rooms and which provides sleeping arrangements services and additional services such as catering, recreation and leisure. Unique tourist attractions have also been included as Tourist Enterprises.

## The Grant Scheme

Tourist Enterprises which are located in Priority Area A will be eligible for a non-refundable grant of up to 20% of approved investments. Tourist Enterprises which are located in the Negev will be entitled to a 30% grant.

Tourist Enterprises which are located in Priority Area B will be eligible for a non-refundable grant of up to 10% from approved investments.

In addition to the grants, Tourism Enterprises are eligible for tax benefits, including: reduced corporate income tax rates, and accelerated depreciation on related assets.

The Innovations Authority (IA) of the Ministry of Economy and Trade is responsible for implementing government policy regarding the support and encouragement of industrial research and development in Israel. Research & development grants are available from the IA at rates ranging from 20% to 85% of the approved budget. R&D grants of up to 50% may also be available from a number of bilateral funds signed between Israel and: Maryland, New York, Wisconsin, Massachusetts, Colorado, Oregon and Virginia, USA; UK, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Canada, Hong Kong, India, Korea, China, Australia, Singapore and Taiwan.

#### *Development of Novel Product*

A single or multi-year program that will provide know-how, processes or methods for the manufacture of a new product or the major improvement of an existing one or a new process or a major improvement in an existing process. The product must have a sizeable potential for export sales. Support is in the form of a conditional grant amounting to 30-50% of the approved R&D budget.

#### *Support for Start-Up Company*

Support is in the form of a conditional grant of 66% of the approved R&D budget up to a maximum of \$250,000 per year for up to two years. Any approved R&D expenditure above \$250,000 may receive a conditional grant of 50%. The R&D support includes beta-site testing as well as patent registration.

#### *Royalty Payments*

Any income deriving from an R&D program that has enjoyed government support is liable for the payment of royalties to the IA. The royalty payments are based upon a percentage of sales up to the repayment of the grant.

#### *Technological Incubators*

Technological incubators provide a supportive framework enabling entrepreneurs with innovations to develop their ideas into a commercial product, and to reach the point at which they can attract capital investments from the private business sector. R&D activities conducted in technological incubators are entitled to grants of up to 85% of the approved program or 100% in peripheral incubators. The grant is limited to NIS 2.1 million for a two-year period.

Biotechnological incubators are aimed at supporting biotech research, given the specific nature and needs of that sector. In line with the current tendency for privatization, the private sector, in the form of franchisees, plays a key role in the project. The government's participation in such projects is through a convertible bond, while the incubators are actually managed by the franchisees.

The franchisee obtains, for each project, a government loan of up to 85% of the approved budget in the 1st year, up to 80% in the 2nd year and up to 75% in the 3rd year. The approved budget for up to 3 years shall not exceed NIS 8,100,000. The franchisee is responsible for raising supplementary funding to cover the rest of the approved budget.

For each incubator project, the franchisee negotiates with the entrepreneur the percentage of control in the company running the project.

The franchisee provides a physical plant with adequate infrastructure for biotechnological R&D, administrative staff and accessibility to consulting services. In return for covering the operating costs of the biotechnological incubator, the franchisee receives up to 5% of the shares of each company accepted by the incubator.

#### *Aid to Individual Technology Entrepreneurs*

TNUFA- the Israel Idea Promotion Center is a non-profit Israeli, government-supported organization, dedicated to helping individual entrepreneurs successfully commercialize their new product ideas by providing seed money grants of 85% or up to NIS 200,000 in addition to free legal, marketing and business-management consultations. Most of TNUFA's budget is based on royalties from successful projects

*Trade Unions and Workers Councils*

There is no legal requirement for employers to recognize any trade union unless a majority of the work force votes in favor of such recognition. Agreements between employers and trade unions over pay and conditions are not binding by law and unions may not take industrial action without first securing a majority vote in a secret ballot of their members. There is no legal requirement for employees to be represented on the board of directors of companies.

*Labor Related Costs*

The Israeli employee's labor and social security costs include the following:

- **National Insurance (Social Security)**

For an employee earning up to 60% of the average national salary, the employer will pay 3.45% in national insurance and the employee will pay 0.4% of his salary in national insurance. For an employee earning more than 60% of the average national salary, the employer will pay 6.75% in national insurance and the employee will pay 7% of his salary in national insurance.

Cover includes unemployment insurance, maternity benefits, work injury, child allowances, old age pensions, medical care costs and reserve military duty compensation.

- **Health Insurance**

For an employee earning up to 60% of the average national salary, the employer will deduct 3.10% from the employee's salary for health insurance payments. For an employee earning more than 60% of the average national salary, the employer will deduct 5% from the employee's salary for health insurance payments.

- **Paid Vacation**

Employees are entitled to yearly paid vacations of from 2 to 4 weeks depending on length of employment. They are also entitled to a recreational allowance based on length of service.

- **Severance Pay and Pension Funds**

Employees are entitled to severance pay on dismissal or reaching retirement age (67 for men and 64 for women) but not on voluntary resignation. However, some



employers are required to pay severance pay on resignation under the terms of specific labor agreements.

Severance pay amounts to one month's salary for every year of employment based on the last month's salary received. Many employers provide for this by monthly payments to a provident fund.

In addition, most employers are required by labor agreements to make monthly payments to pension funds, at the rate of 5% of salaries, for employees' retirement pension.

- **Sick Leave:**

Employees are entitled to paid sick leave.

- **Education Fund:**

Some employers make provision for the ongoing education of senior and academic employees by monthly payments, at the rate of 5 - 7.5 % of employees' salaries, to a provident fund.

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Foreign employees, have no vested right to enter Israel for the purpose of employment. A foreigner, who wishes to perform work in Israel, regardless of duration, must first obtain a work permit (B-1) from the Ministry of Interior, from the Department of Foreign Workers.

A foreign worker will be deported from Israel if he works without a work permit and he will further be subjected to fines and possible imprisonment. In addition, the employer will be prevented from sending other employees to Israel and will be subjected to criminal offences if he employs a foreigner under a tourist visa.

**Obtaining a work permit entails completing a four-step process.**

1. The first step involves receiving a recommendation from the Ministry of Interior to work in Israel. This is possible only after convincing the Ministry that the employee is an expert in his field, earning more than twice the average salary in the market and proving that there is no other local Israeli citizen who can perform the same task.
2. The second step includes submitting a request to the Ministry of the Interior to invite the worker to Israel.
3. The third step involves having the visa stamped in the worker's passport.
4. The fourth step involves the stamp of multiple entries, after entering the country.

Reviewing a working permit application usually take up to 90 days. Permits approved will usually be given for 1 year but they may be extended for up to 5 years depending on the uniqueness of the worker in question.

It is not possible to convert a tourist and business visitor's visa (B-2) to a working visa (B-1) while the foreigner is in Israel. Therefore, an employee who wishes to work in Israel is required to obtain a work permit **before** entering Israel.

The Ministry of the Interior has started to conduct periodic inspections ensuring that companies comply with local law concerning the employment of expats in Israel. The inspectors intend to make sure that foreign employees are lawfully being employed and have a valid B1 working visa. There is an increasing trend to initiate criminal proceedings against employers and their managers (personally) that unlawfully employ foreign employees.

According to the Law of Entry into Israel, 1952, a person entering Israel without a permit, or committing a breach of one of the conditions of his entry permit, is committing an offense and the punishment is one year of imprisonment. Such a person may be deported.

A person entering Israel without a permit, providing false information to obtain for himself or another a visa or a license to reside, committing a breach of one of the

conditions of his entry permit, or who violates any other instructions or regulations of this law commits an offense and the punishment is one year of imprisonment. The offender may be deported.

Employing a foreign worker who is not permitted to work in Israel according to the Law of Entry will be subject to a fine of ILS 75,300 (approx. \$ 20,350) or two years imprisonment.

Further to the Foreign Workers Law (Unlawful Employment) – 1991, an employer who employs a foreign worker who does not have a work permit will be liable to pay fines of ILS 58,400 (approx. \$ 15,780) and an additional fine of ILS 5,600 (approx. \$1510) **per worker** for each day that the offense continues.

In the event that the foreign worker is employed unlawfully, the punishment may be up to one year's imprisonment or a fine of ILS 116,800 (approx. \$ 31,568) and an additional fine of ILS 5,600 (approx. \$1510) **per employee** for every day the offense continues.

The fines are subject to future changes.

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Israeli VCs are focused on technology companies, mainly in the fields of communications and components, software, semiconductor chip design and manufacture, Internet and e-commerce, Bio-tech, Cleantech, cyber security and medical devices.

### *Types of Target Company*

In VC transactions, target companies may be seed/pre-seed stage companies or later-stage companies. The companies may be registered in Israel or be corporations registered in Delaware with Israeli subsidiaries.

### *Investors*

In recent years, several foreign venture funds and venture lending companies have opened offices in Israel and have invested in local Israeli companies.

### *Tax Incentives*

Foreign investors are generally exempt from Israeli capital gains tax on the realization of their investment in Israeli high-tech companies if the following conditions are met: the shares were purchased on or after 1 January 2009; the shares were not held through a permanent establishment maintained by the non-resident shareholder in Israel; the shares are not in a company whose assets consist primarily of real estate; the shares were not purchased from a related party. The exemption does not apply to shares in publicly-traded companies.

### *VC Fund management*

VC funds typically establish a management company in Israel, and pay an annual management fee of approximately 2.5% of total fund commitments. This fee may decrease after an investment.

### *VC Fund as Limited Partnerships*

VC funds are not regulated and do not require a license. VC funds are usually limited partnerships and are subject to securities legislation restricting the offering of limited partnership units to no more than 35 persons, excluding certain qualified investors consisting primarily of financial institutions.

### *Investor Protection*

The VC fund's limited partnership agreement governs the relationship between investors and the fund. Investors usually seek: confirmation of limited liability; restrictions on the use of proceeds; Employee Retirement Security Act 1974 (ERISA) restrictions; restrictions on recourse borrowing; financial reporting; key man provisions; non-competition restrictions preventing promoters from setting up a competing fund until certain time periods have passed; conflicts of interest provisions.

### *Investment Objectives*

Long term capital appreciation from high growth, technology companies.

VC funds generally have a 7-10-year term with the ability to extend this term by a number of one-year periods (usually two to three extensions). VC funds usually aim to complete their investment period (deploy capital in new portfolio investments) within 3-4 years of the fund's initial closing (while retaining capital for management fees and follow-on investments until exit) and to exit most of its investments within 3-5 years of investment. Since 2001, the average period between investment and exit has lengthened. VC funds in Israel now usually extend their investment periods (sometimes to 6-7 years).

### *Investments*

VC funds generally invest in equity in the form of preferred shares. The use of convertible debt is also very common before an investment round, both as bridge financing for immediate use and as a means to circumvent the need to set a company valuation when no third-party investors are available to set a valuation.

Venture lending, where lenders provide secured loans to portfolio companies and receive an equity component in the form of warrants or an option to invest in the next round, has increased over the last few years.

### *Preferred Shareholders*

Holders of preferred shares typically have the right to receive a dividend in priority to the payment of a dividend to any other class of shares. Although this right is very common, most high-tech private companies in practice do not pay dividends.

### *Liquidation preference*

The right to a liquidation preference, typically a participating preference entitling the holder to some kind of preferred return (in Israeli companies, with an annual interest component, typically 6% to 8%), followed by the right to participate with the holders of ordinary shares on an "as converted" basis in any remaining proceeds. The liquidation preference applies both to actual liquidation of the company and to most exit events including a sale of all or substantially all of the assets of the company.

Anti-dilution protection is typically implemented by adjustments to the conversion rate under which the preferred shares may be converted into ordinary shares. The protection ranges from full ratchet to broad-based weighted average.

### *Board Representation*

Typically, investors receive representation on the board of directors and/or the right to appoint a non-voting observer to the board. This right may be conditional on the investor maintaining a certain level of ownership in the investee company.

### *Protective provisions*

As holders of preferred shares, the fund also benefits from protective provisions, requiring the approval of the fund (occasionally of a director appointed by the fund, and occasionally of a specified majority of all holders of preferred shares) for a variety of actions, often including: creation or issuance of a class of securities equal or senior to those held by the fund; approval of exit events (mergers and acquisitions and initial public offerings); the payment of dividends; the repurchase of ordinary shares; adverse changes to the rights of the shares; increasing the size of the board of directors; incurring indebtedness in excess of a specified amount; material changes to the business of the company; management type activities including, hiring and firing of key executives; bank signature rights; establishment of an annual operational budget.

### *Right of first refusal*

Investors usually have a right of first refusal in relation to the sale of shares by other shareholders. Sometimes this right is limited to the holders of a certain minimum number of shares (for example, 2% of the outstanding share capital) and is exercised on a pro rata basis. This right is usually not reciprocal, that is, the holders of ordinary shares do not have a right of first refusal in relation to sales of shares by the fund.

Exercise of the right of first refusal is often conditional on the purchase by the shareholders of all the shares being offered. There are exceptions for transfers of shares for estate planning purposes.

### *No sale*

Often founders are completely barred from, or severely limited in selling their shares for a specific period of time (often at least three years, but occasionally until exit). Typically, exceptions are made for transfers of shares to family members or for other bona fide



estate planning purposes. These restrictions are intended to ensure that the founders recognize their economic interests as being linked with the success of the company.

### *Minority Shareholder Protection*

Investors have the right to sell shares together with the founders (or other holders of ordinary shares), if and when the founders sell shares to third parties. This right (tag-along right or right of co-sale) may be exercised if the investor elects not to exercise its right of first refusal. The rationale is that the investors are investing in the founders, and if the founders decrease their shareholdings, the investors have the right to exit with the founders.

Tag-along rights also serve to make it more difficult for founders to sell their shares and, in practice, force any such sale to be made in full coordination with the investors. It is very uncommon for founders to have tag-along rights in relation to sales of shares by VC funds.

### *Drag-along (bring-along) rights*

Drag-along rights (also referred to as bring-along rights) facilitate the sale of the company in the face of opposition from minority shareholders. The articles of association often provide that where a specific percentage of shareholders (often including the holders of a specific percentage of preferred shares) agree to a bona fide third party purchase offer, all shareholders must then sell.

The Companies Law 1999, provides that if the holders of 80% (90% in the case of companies established before 1999) of shares wish to sell, then all shareholders can be forced to sell.

### *Pre-emption rights*

Investors almost invariably require pre-emptive rights to participate in future financing rounds. Sometimes the right is limited to participation on a pro rata basis; other times the investor obtains a right of over-allotment to take up shares that other participating shareholders elect not to purchase. Companies typically attempt to resist the request for over-allotment rights. These rights are generally subject to certain standard exclusions, such as: issuances on exercise of employee share options; issuance on conversion of preferred shares; and also, certain issuances of warrants to strategic partners in transactions not primarily intended as financing transactions.

### *Consents*

Approval by the company's shareholders and board of directors is required to complete the investment. In addition, if the company has already raised funds in an earlier investment round, approval by the earlier investor is also likely to be required. If the company has received tax incentives or a grant from the Ministry of Economy and Trade, consent from the department providing the tax incentives or grant is also required.

### *Share Options*

Israeli companies usually provide incentives to employees (including founders) by granting share options which are subject to vesting over a number of years. Employees typically receive share options, which are exercisable if the employee continues to be employed during the relevant vesting period.

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The Antitrust Law, 1988, is enforced by the Israeli Antitrust Authority. Under the Law, a restrictive arrangement is an agreement made between parties conducting business, where at least one of the parties restricts itself in a way that could obviate or reduce the business competition between that party and part or all of the other parties to the agreement, or between that party and an entity that is not a party to the agreement.

An agreement that determines prices, market share, profit margins, or quotas will be deemed to be a restrictive agreement. However, the law excludes some agreements from its general definition and they are not considered restrictive agreements (e.g. entitlement to use proprietary rights, international transport, etc.).

Participation in any restrictive agreement is prohibited unless the agreement has been approved by a court of law, received a temporary permit from the Director-General of the Antitrust Authority or was granted an exemption.

In recent years, enforcement of this law has become more evident, in view of the expansion of the Antitrust Authority and the growing awareness of the advantages of competitive markets in Israel.

#### *Block exemption*

In 2000, the Director-General of the Antitrust Authority defined block exemptions that exempt specific agreements from the need for a permit.

These block exemptions include R&D agreements, joint ventures and franchises.

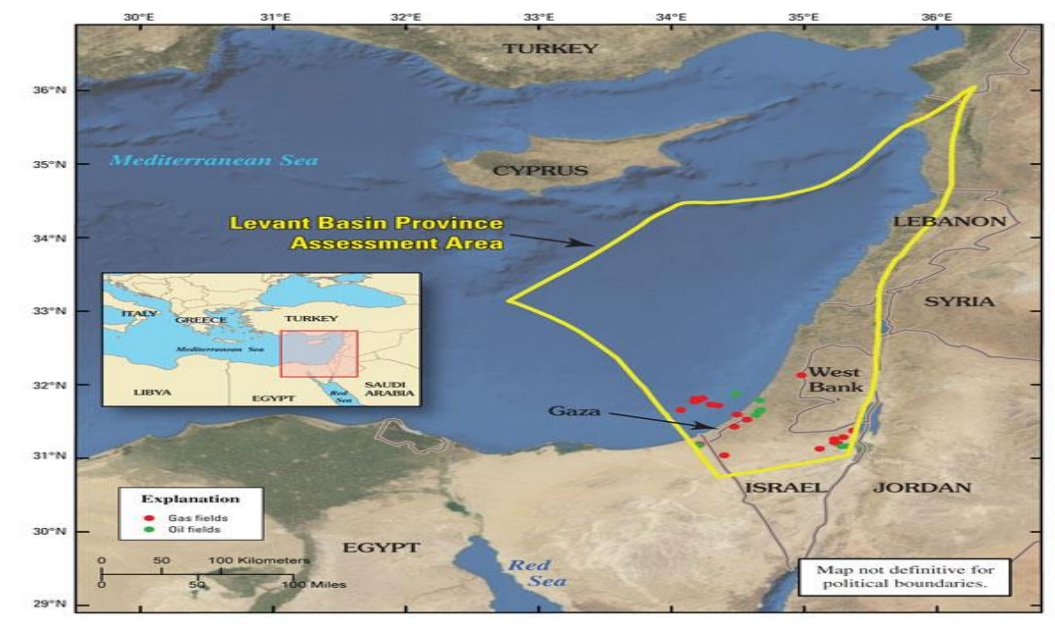
According to the Restrictive Business Practices Law, the following mergers and acquisitions require the approval of the Antitrust Authority:

- Subsequent to the merger or acquisition, the share of the merged parties in the production, sale, marketing, or purchase of a single product or a group of products or services will exceed 50%.
- The combined turnover of the merged companies (domestic turnover only) in the fiscal year prior to the merger exceeded NIS 150 million (approximately US\$ 39 million), and at least two of the merged companies have a turnover of more than NIS 10 million (approximately US\$ 2.62 million) each.
- One of the parties is already a monopoly.

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### Israel's "Oil Rush"

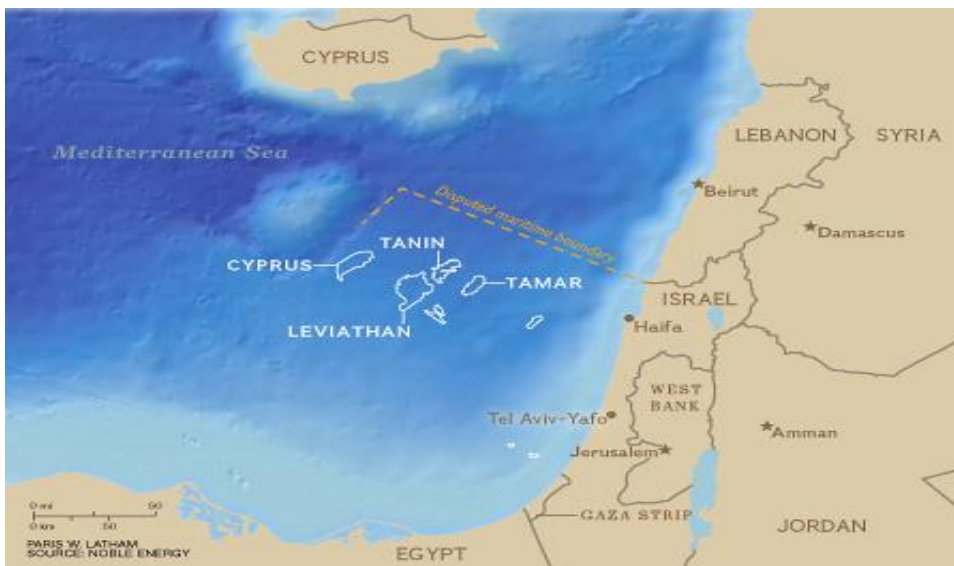
Israel is currently undergoing an oil and gas exploration boom. Recently, Israel has seen some of the world's largest discoveries of gas and oil. These new oil and gas discoveries have jumpstarted significant foreign investment into drilling and exploration rights. The most recent discovery in December 2010 named Leviathan was the world's largest discovery of natural gas in a decade. It is projected to have 19 trillion cubic feet of gas (540 billion cubic meters) of gas, enough to supply all of Europe for over a year. Many experts believe there could be more than 4 billion barrels of crude oil below these natural gas deposits. Israel's infrastructure minister called this discovery "the most important energy news since the founding of the State of Israel."



### Tamar Gas Field

The Tamar gas field is a natural gas field in the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of Israel. The gas field is located roughly 80 kilometers (50 mi) west of Haifa in waters 1,700 meters (5,600 ft) deep. While there have been small oil and gas discoveries in Israel over the decades, Tamar was the first large-scale hydrocarbon resource discovered within Israeli territory. It was also the first gas discovery made in geological layers dating back

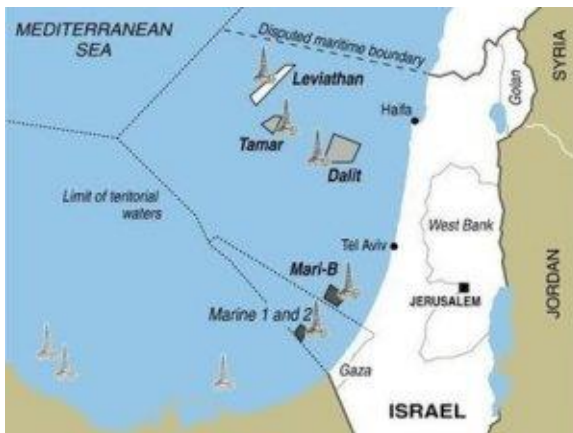
to the Oligo–Miocene era in the up-until-then little-explored Levant basin of the Eastern Mediterranean. Since Tamar's discovery, large gas discoveries have been made in other analogous geological formations of the same age in the region. The Tamar gas field is estimated to contain a probable 275 billion cubic meters (9.7 trillion cubic feet) of natural gas. In September 2010, Noble announced that development of the Tamar field was beginning at an expected cost of \$3 billion, and with a target completion of Q4 2012. In March 2012 the Tamar partners signed a 15-year, US\$14 billion deal with the Israel Electric Corporation to supply it with 42 billion cubic meters (BCM) of natural gas, with an option to increase the gas purchases up to \$23 billion. By March 2012, the consortium developing Tamar had signed deals worth up to a total of \$32 billion with six Israeli entities, thereby committing up to 133BCM, or approximately half of the deposit's total probable reserves of 275BCM (as estimated by Texas-based Netherland, Sewell & Associates Inc., (NSAI).



### Leviathan Gas Field

The Leviathan gas field is a large natural gas field located in the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of Israel. It was discovered in June 2010. The gas field is located roughly 130 kilometers (81 mi) west of Haifa in waters 1,500 meters (4,900 ft) deep in the Levantine basin, a rich hydrocarbon area in one of the world's larger offshore gas finds of the past decade. The Leviathan gas field is located 47 kilometers (29 mi) south-west of the Tamar gas field.

The first well, Leviathan 1, was first drilled to a depth of 5,170 meters (16,960 ft) where the deposit found was estimated to contain 16 trillion cubic feet (450 billion cubic meters) of natural gas. The well was drilled by Homer Ferrington drilling rig. The second stage of drilling of the Leviathan 1 well was intended to reach a depth of 7,200 meters (23,600 ft) where the estimated natural gas reserve is an additional 9 trillion cubic feet (250 billion cubic meters) and potentially 600 million barrels of oil. While the gas discovery at -5170m was made in the Tamar sands layer which was already known to contain gas in other geological formations of the same type in the region, the additional oil and gas potential exists in a deeper layer which to date has not been drilled in the Levant basin. At the time of discovery, the Leviathan gas field was the largest find ever discovered in the under-explored area of the Mediterranean Sea and the largest discovery in the history of Noble Energy. Noble Energy operates Leviathan with a 39.66% working interest; Delek Drilling holds 22.67%; Avner Oil Exploration holds 22.67%; and Ratio Oil Exploration holds the remaining 15%.



Following these discoveries preceded by smaller significant natural gas discoveries, Israel is seeing new entrants into its oil and gas industry. Noble Energy, which has significant ownership in the Leviathan and Tamar fields has the largest footprint in Israel. ATP Oil & Gas Corporation and Caspian Drilling Company, a subsidiary of State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR), one of the world's largest oil companies are both currently operating in Israel. Other oil and gas companies with smaller operations have recently entered the market such as: GeoGlobal Resources, Transocean, Baker Hughes and Halliburton. However, most of the larger global oil and gas corporations (Shell, Exxon-Mobil etc.,) have stayed away. Former Petroleum Commissioner, Dr. Yaakov Mimran said this was due to the fact that those global oil companies would lose oil suppliers in countries hostile to Israel (70% of the world's oil are located in such countries.) This gives more opportunity for lesser known and smaller firms interested in



entering the Israeli gas market.” Since September 2019, Noble Energy is executing the installation of the required units to set-up the drilling platform towards the flow of Natural Gas to the Israeli market by the end of 2019. This will result in cleaner energy that will provide energy independence and cleaner air for Israel.

### **The Laws Governing the Israeli Oil and Gas Industry**

The Israel Petroleum Law (1952) (the “**Law**”) and subsequent amendments and regulations governs the exploration and production of petroleum in Israel, including the continental shelf. The competent authority that grants licenses is, in most cases, the Ministry of National Infrastructure while applications for petroleum rights are submitted to the Petroleum Commissioner.

Under the Law, “Petroleum” is defined as “any petroleum fluid, whether liquid or gaseous, and includes oil, natural gas, natural gasoline, condensates and related fluid hydrocarbons, and also asphalt and other solid petroleum hydrocarbons when dissolved in and producible with fluid petroleum”.

Petroleum resources belong to the State of Israel, whether or not located on state lands. No person is allowed to explore for or produce petroleum without receiving a right under the Law. The Law provides for three types of rights, two relevant to the exploration stage and the third relates to production.

#### **Preliminary Permit**

The lowest level right is the preliminary permit, which may be granted for a period not exceeding 18 months. The permit allows the prospector to conduct preliminary investigations, except for test drilling, to ascertain the prospects for discovering petroleum in the area covered by the permit. The recipient of a preliminary permit is entitled to request a priority right on the permit area, which, if granted, prevents the awarding of any other petroleum right in the area. There are no statutory restrictions as to the maximum size of the permit area or to the number of permits which may be held by a prospector, however the policy is to award no larger an area than that which the applicant has a reasonable plan of operation and has demonstrated possession of the necessary financial resources to execute the plan.

#### **License**

The second type of right is the license, which provides an exclusive right to undertake further exploration work, requiring the drilling of test wells. The initial term of a license

is up to three years and may be extended for up to an additional four years. A license area may not exceed 400,000 dunams (approximately 100,000 acres).

### **Production Lease (Concession)**

Upon the discovery of petroleum, the licensee has a statutory right to receive the third type of right, which is a production lease. The initial lease term is 30 years, extendible for a maximum period of 50 years. A lease confers upon the lessee the exclusive right to explore for and produce petroleum in the lease area and requires that the lessee produce petroleum in commercial quantities (or pursue test or development drilling). The lessee is entitled to transport and market the petroleum produced, subject to the right of the Government to call upon it to supply local needs first, at market price. A lessee is liable to pay a royalty of 12.5% of the quantity of petroleum produced and saved from the lease area, excluding the quantity of the petroleum used in operating the leased area, and subject to a minimum royalty set forth in the Law.

The holder of a petroleum right is expected to carry out its operations with due diligence and in accordance with the accepted practice in the petroleum industry. It is required to submit progress and final reports, as detailed in the Law and Regulations. The information supplied by the holder of the petroleum right is kept secret for as long as it has a petroleum right (permit, license or lease) in the area concerned.

Holder of a petroleum right is entitled to import to Israel, free of customs duties, the goods required by it for petroleum exploration purposes.

The grant of a petroleum right does not automatically entitle the holder to enter the land to which the right applies or to carry out exploration and production work. Such work often requires the consent of other public bodies such as planning authorities, maritime nature reserves etc.). The holder of a petroleum right may request the Government to acquire, on its behalf, land required for petroleum purposes.

The Law provides for an administrative structure, headed by the Petroleum Commissioner who acts in consultation with an Advisory Board. The Law is under the responsibility of the Minister of National Infrastructures.

Applications for petroleum rights are submitted to the Petroleum Commissioner, in accordance with the provisions set out in the Law and Regulations.

The award of petroleum rights, with the exception of the preliminary permit and priority right, is a matter of public record and is published in the Petroleum Register and in the

In 2011, the telecommunications sector in Israel had revenues of US\$ 7.5 billion, representing about 4% of the GDP.

### A Policy for a Multi-operator Environment

Israel has pursued progressive liberalization and privatization in its communications and information technology subsector. These reforms have included privatization, with the sale in 2005 by the Government of its controlling interest in Bezeq, Israel's incumbent fixed-wire line service provider; adoption of a regulatory regime suitable for a multi-operator environment; and competitive local exchange carrier (CLEC) licenses for infrastructure, transmission, data (broadband) and telephony services, a wireless tender carried out in 2010 which led to the entry of two new infrastructure-based operators, and an ongoing process for the development of a wholesale market in fixed communications.

The Communications Law empowers the Minister of Communications to enact legislation concerning all relevant telecommunications services and equipment, including technical specifications for telecommunications equipment and type approvals. The Communications Law states that any license and change thereof must contribute to competition in the field of telecommunications. It also provides that a licensee must fulfill certain prerequisites (requirements vary from one licensee to another). Licenses may be revised or cancelled if an operator becomes, inter alia, anti-competitive or unfit to provide telecommunications services. There are generally no controls over the tariffs of private suppliers, and certain Bezeq tariffs, which are regulated owing to Bezeq's largely monopolistic market position.

Cross-subsidies from monopolized services to competitive services are not allowed.

The Communications Law was amended in August 2001 to eliminate the existing cable television franchises and introduce a revised licensing regime. This allows use of cable infrastructure for the provision of telephony and advanced fixed

telecommunications services, such as data communications and broadband Internet access, in addition to multi-channel subscriber television already provided by franchise. In May 2003, a new amendment to the Communications Law allowed CLECs to compete in the fixed telecommunications services without USO (universal service obligation) as from September 2004. The Ministry of Communications subsequently issued a set of regulations to establish the terms of procedures to apply for such a license, called a

"Specialized Domestic license", and, to date five such licenses have been granted. These operators comprise over 30% of the fixed telephony market as of 2012, with the cable incumbent (HOT), providing most of these lines.

In 1984, the regulatory and operational functions in Israeli telecommunications were separated. All telecommunications facilities, which had until that time been government operated, were transferred to the newly established Bezeq Company. Bezeq was granted a tightly-regulated monopoly for the provision of telecommunications services.

The rise of the ICT revolution in the 90's, the interest of existing and potential carriers in using the new technologies to provide enhanced services, and a desire to confer the benefits of competition onto the consumer, have led the Ministry to initiate strategic amendments to the existing regulatory structure.

In 1994, the first significant step towards a competitive telecommunications market was taken: the incumbent Bezeq was required to form subsidiary companies in order to provide services in market sectors other than domestic, fixed wire line telephony, such as the cellular (Pelephone Ltd) and international (Bezeq International Ltd.) market sectors. By the end of 1994, the cellular market sector became indeed a competitive one, when Cellcom the second cellular company began operations, after winning a public tender. Competition levels grew further in 1998, as Partner stepped in (again through a public tender) and in 2001 when MIRS was granted a cellular license. The international telephony and data market saw the entry of competition in 1997, as Barak and Golden Lines began operation. As a result of the introduction of competition for international phone calls, the price of an international call dropped over 70% in a matter of weeks. An amendment of the Telecommunications Act in 1997 enabled the licensing of DBS satellite TV service provider; which began operation on July 2000, and competes with the cable company in the multi-channel broadcasting market.

Bezeq's exclusive monopoly-by-law on fixed telephone services ended in June 1999. In September 2000, the Minister of Communications enacted regulations for the licensing of new operators in the fixed services market – any entity meeting the licensing criteria may receive a license. In February 2001 the Ministry issued a tender for the assignment of additional 2G and 3G cellular frequencies. The tender for additional cellular services using 2G or 3G frequencies was concluded successfully, and frequency bands were allocated for future use by the three major mobile telephone operators.

In August 2001, the Telecommunications Act was amended by doing away with the existing cable television franchises, and introduced a licensing regime, which allows use of cable infrastructure for the provision of telephony and advanced fixed

telecommunications services such as data communications and broadband Internet access, as well as the continued provision of multi-channel subscriber television.

In May 2003, the Telecommunications Act was amended to allow CLEC's to compete in the fixed telecommunications services without USO (Universal Service Obligation) as of September 2004. Subsequently, the Ministry of Communications issued a set of regulations to establish the terms and procedures to apply for such a license known as a "Specialized Domestic License". Currently, five of these Licenses were given to 012 Telecom, Globcall Telecommunications. Cellcom fixed telecommunications services, Bezeq International, and Partner fixed telecommunications services.

While Bezeq remains Israel's leading domestic, fixed-service operator, the cable operator HOT Telecom has acquired more than 300,000 voice telephony subscribers, mainly in the households and small business segment. Alternative operators provide over 30% of the revenues in the fixed telephony market.

In 2007, the Minister of Communications appointed a public committee, headed by Professor Rueben Gronau of the Economics Department at the Hebrew University (the Gronau Committee), to recommend a future regulatory and competitive policy. The committee presented its recommendations in the summer of 2008. To provide incentives for investment by incumbent operators, the committee recommended that the Minister adopt a policy of mandated access to incumbent networks, including, inter alia, local loop unbundling (along with other network elements necessary to implement LLU), wholesale line rental and resale of incumbent services. The committee's recommendations were based on a thorough investigation of the European regulatory scheme, and were designed to ensure that competitive carriers would upgrade network infrastructure, causing incumbents to do so as well.

The committee recommended that Bezeq not be given a "regulatory holiday" nor any monopoly over the use of the NGA, and that competitors be provided access to the NGA according to European best practices as they evolve over time. The Minister adopted the recommendations of the committee on the matter of a wholesale market in fixed communications, as the committee recommended them.

A further committee, headed by Mr. Amir Hayek, CPA, recommended that the policy of wholesale access should be carried out, and the Minister adopted the main points of this committee's recommendations. The ensuing policy document set out a "roadmap" for a wholesale market in fixed communications, along with liberalization of the constraints on incumbents, including, inter alia, more flexibility in tariffs and reductions in structural

separation within the "Bezeq" Group. The implementation of this policy is ongoing, and remains a strategic focus of the Ministry.

## Review of Israel's Telecommunications Market Sectors

### Fixed Services

The "phone-lines-to-households penetration rate" is falling, owing mainly to increased use of mobile services and broadband internet, and currently stands at approximately 92%, while the "home-pass rate" for domestic telephony exceeds 99%.

Broadband service in Israel (by cable modem or ADSL) has a home-pass rate of 99%, and a penetration rate of approximately 82% of households (2010). High speed internet access is firmly entrenched as a standard service in most Israeli homes

In March 2002, the cable companies (before the merger into the unified HOT Telecom company) were granted licenses to provide broadband telephony access on their infrastructure (using cable modems). The cable infrastructure became a competitor to the Bezeq's infrastructure. As a result, the penetration rate of broadband 2012 households had grown from approximately 4% in 2002 to approximately 82% in 2007, with a home-pass of 99%. The prices of broadband Internet Access have decreased sharply, and currently stands at approximately 88 NIS (about \$23 per month), with average speeds of about 8 Mbps. Since high-speed internet access is a key driver for the global ICT economy, and it is an important key in advancing the Israeli market. Recent market developments have increased the pace of speed upgrades among consumers, with both Bezeq and HOT offering 100Mbps service. Bezeq has rolled out a fiber-to-the-curb (FTTC) network and HOT is upgrading their hybrid fiber-coax network to allow higher speeds to more consumers.

Since September 2004, it had become possible to new competitors to enter the fixed telecommunications service market, free from Universal Service Obligations, and there are 5 providers operating according to those licenses. These licenses are granted to operators who own limited infrastructures, and to operators who provide VOIP service over broadband infrastructure of other operators.

### Cellular Telephony

There are five cellular operators in Israel who provide digital technology countrywide coverage and modern 3G (third generation) services. Pelephone, the oldest operator, has rolled out a UMTS network. The second operator, Cellcom, still operates the American IS-136 TDMA technology as a legacy second-generation network, but uses European

DCS 1800 and UMTS for third generation services. Orange (Partner Communications), the third operator, uses GSM technology DCS 1800 and UMTS. Two new operators entered the market in 2010: Hot mobile, which uses third-generation UMTS technology alongside a legacy iDen network acquired along with small operator Mirs Communications, while Golan Telecom uses UMTS technology exclusively. Both Golan Telecom and HOT mobile have concluded national roaming agreements which allow for nationwide coverage while they are meant to build their own networks.

In addition to these infrastructure-based competitors, the Ministry amended the regulatory framework to allow provision of services by mobile virtual network operators (MVNO's). Two of Israel's leading supermarket chains have begun offering services as MVNO's.

The introduction of competition in 1995 led to an extremely high subscriber growth rate, one of the highest in the world. As of 2011, penetration stands at approximately 130%. This rapid growth was achieved by providing nationwide coverage, low tariffs, introduction of Calling Party Pays (CPP) method in 1994, network quality, and effective marketing. On December 18, 2001, tenders were concluded for licenses for additional 2G and 3G cellular frequency bands, in order to expand network capacities and enable use of broadband cellular applications employing DCS-1800 and UMTS technologies. Cellcom, Pelephone and Partner participated in these tenders; a total of 115MHz has been assigned to those parties at a total license fee of 240 million USD. The new frequencies enabled the operators to provide GSM1800 modern services and 3rd Generation UMTS features. During 2004, additional 10 MHz were assigned to the UMTS network of Cellcom, by tender, and in 2010 a further spectrum tender resulted in the entry of two new operators.

As part of the process of increasing competition, the Ministry lowered the regulated rate for termination of calls on mobile networks from approx. 0.27 NIS to approx. 0.07 NIS, at the beginning of 2011, after a comprehensive consultation. These updated rates contribute to a more competitive environment and better reflect the cost of terminating calls on mobile networks.

### Number Portability

On September 1, 2006, the act approved by the Israeli government on August 15, 2004 regarding the implementation of the number portability in Israel has become valid. "The Portability Law" allow fixed and mobile telephony subscribers to keep their phone number in the case of exchanging operators. Over 300,000 consumers have taken advantage of this option, which is seen as a critical factor in improving the competitiveness of both the mobile and fixed telephony markets. One notable feature of the Israeli number portability scheme is the short turnaround time of 3 hours, with no



more than half an hour of interruption of service. The introduction of 2 new operators was a significant test of the number portability system, which continues to perform well.

#### International Telecommunications Services

International long-distance services have traditionally been a monopoly of Bezeq International (a subsidiary of Bezeq). In July 1997, two privately-owned facility-based carriers, Golden Lines and Barak, were also licensed. In May 2004, three additional licenses were given to Internet Gold, Xphone, and Netvision. Some smaller entrants have since begun offering services, bringing the total to eight.

In 2007, outgoing fixed international telephone traffic amounted to 1.6 billion minutes; the figure for incoming traffic was 1.3 billion minutes.

The licensed operators currently deliver services over a modern digital network, including several switching facilities incorporating advanced intelligent network infrastructure. The operators also use VOIP technology. Other enhancements include optical submarine cables (including Lev, a 5 Gb/s fiber cable between Israel, Cyprus and Italy, in service since 1998, and MED Nautilus, a 3.84 Tb/s DWDM system in restorable ring configuration, between Israel, Cyprus, Greece and Italy); digital satellite links; modern operator facilities; and advanced data communications facilities. In recent years, two new submarine cables have been inaugurated, one (owned by Bezeq International) to mainland Europe and another (owned by the Tamares Group) to Cyprus. These new cables carry mainly internet traffic, which is growing at a fast pace

Outgoing traffic quickly tripled and the new carriers rapidly gained substantial market share as the incumbent operator lost its exclusive position. Fair and transparent interconnection arrangements, equal access rules and bold cuts in retail prices, have enhanced competition in international services. As a result of the competition –in 1997- prices dropped by approximately 70% and in 2004 additional substantial reductions accrued. Today, owing to significant competition from non-licensed traffic such as VoIP, international calling is becoming part of a bundle of services. For example, many mobile operators offer unlimited international calling to a large number of destinations as part of their service package.

#### Internet & Broadband

There are 3 large Internet service providers in Israel and 45 smaller license holders, serving more than three million users, including above 60% of households and above 80% of businesses. Cellular phone companies introduced wireless Internet during 2001. Bezeq began to offer ADSL services in 2000, and the cable companies started to provide



broadband cable modem access in March 2002. Internet service providers purchase international IP bandwidth, connect to the backbone networks of Bezeq and HOT, and provide services to consumers based on a VPN configuration. The average speed in Israeli is approximately 8Mbps, with speeds of up to 100 Mbps available on HOT's network and 100 Mbps on Bezeq's network. Bezeq is completing the rollout of a fiber-to-the-curb network and beginning trials of a fiber-to-the home network, while HOT is investing in their hybrid fiber-coaxial network to provide higher speeds as well. As a result of the competition, the penetration rate of broadband to households has grown from approximately 4% in 2002 to approximately 82% in 2010. Fixed broadband service in Israel (by Cable Modem or ADSL) has a home-pass of 99%. The tariffs of broadband Internet have dropped precipitously and broadband internet is now a common, household product.

The cable company and Bezeq are obligated to provide universal deployment of broadband Internet access service. Broadband penetration rates are high: over 1,100,000 ADSL subscribers and 600,000 cable modem subscribers, translate to a penetration rate of more than 82%, placing Israel among the leading countries in the world in terms of broadband penetration.

Factors encouraging this growth include the competition between Bezeq and the cable company (both are under universal service obligation for broadband as well as telephony), competition between five major ISP's widespread use of computer in business and at home, advanced telecommunications infrastructure and a regulatory policy of minimal intervention.

Several sophisticated Hebrew-language portals and a vast array of Hebrew web sites also contribute to ubiquitous Internet use in Israel. In addition, the Israeli government has undertaken many e-government initiatives and many interactions with government agencies are done online, such as license renewal, payments, taxation, viewing of court documents, etc.

Israel is a world leader in developing Internet technologies and applications, and Israeli companies operating in the field have marked several international successes. This international reputation is also recognized on the home market, and influences local interest and use.

The country's strong tradition of academic inquiry and research has placed Israel on the global research network for the NGI (Next Generation Internet), linking Israel to the world's seekers of scientific and industrial knowledge through StarTap (Chicago) to the

U.S.-Internet 2 Network, through the Point of Presence (London) to the EU GEANT Network and to Q-Med (Mediterranean consortium Quantum extension).

## Television and Radio - Multichannel TV

Israel's multichannel subscriber television market is regulated by the Council of Cable and Satellite TV Broadcasting, overseen by the Minister of Communications. Currently, this market comprises three operators, all of whom are required to include all public and commercial channels in their offering.

### 1. Cable TV:

Hot Telecommunication Systems Ltd (known under the brand name "Hot"), is the cable TV operator; historically the result of the 2006 merger of three regional cable TV companies (each holding a regional monopoly), the company offers a countrywide, fully digital cable network (including a recording converter, VoD service, and HD channels), and services 893,000 subscribers (2013). Since 2009, the company is held by the European Altice SA cable TV group.

### 2. Satellite TV:

DBS Satellite Services (1998) Ltd, the satellite TV operator, known under its brand name "Yes", began its operations in July 2000 using Israel's AMOS communications satellites. With 578,000 subscribers (2013), it is 49.9% owned by Bezeq, and 50.1% by Eurocom.

The company offers a fully digital network, a recording converter, VoD service, and HD broadcasting.

### 3. Digital Terrestrial TV:

An amendment to the law in 2008 has paved the way to digital terrestrial TV, authorizing The Second Authority for TV and Radio to operate the service; initial operations started in 2009. The service, brand-named IDAN Plus, is offered free of charge, and only requires the one-time acquisition of a special digital converter and antenna kit. As of 2012, circa 500,000 households use the service, which contains Israel's public and commercial TV channels (channel 1, channel 2, channel 10, channel 23, channel 33, the Knesset channel), all public radio stations, and some regional commercial radio stations. Regulatory work is being carried nowadays so that IDAN Plus channel offering grows significantly in the very near future, to include niche and subject-based channels currently broadcast solely by Hot and Yes, as well as a subject-based (possibly children's) channel exclusive to IDAN Plus.

In May 2013, the Minister of Communications and the Ministry of Finance passed a series of reforms in the multichannel television market, under the Economic Arrangements Bill. The reforms include a narrow broadcast package by DBS and Hot, giving the Minister the authority to lower prices or intervene in the composition of stations. He also received the authority to require Yes and Hot to sell the narrow broadcast package to companies wanting to enter the television market, thus paving the way to more competition.

Any telecommunications company that wants to provide television broadcasts will be allowed to market Yes or Hot's narrow broadcast packages. It can buy the package of channels at a price approved or ordered by the minister, and it will have the right to add its own channels to the package and sell them to its customers.

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