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HOW TO STRENGTHEN SLOVENIAN FOREIGN POLICY AS AN ADVOCATE FOR PEACE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN PALESTINE?

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Introduction

War, occupation, and conflict are hindering factors of peace, sustainable development, and regular migration. As of 2019, more than 5.6 million Palestinians were registered with UNRWA as refugees; in 2021, the United Nations reported that more than 52,000 Palestinians were displaced by Israeli airstrikes that had destroyed or badly damaged nearly 450 buildings in the Gaza Strip, and Amnesty International demanded a war crimes investigation. Moreover, during the Covid-19 crisis, people living in war and conflicts suffered the most, like the case of the Palestinian people living in the occupied territories of Palestine. Slovenia previously announced its will to recognize the state of Palestine, and its support for the Palestinian right to self-determination; a stance that dramatically shifted with the change of the Slovenian government in 2020. The hesitancy of the international community to recognize the state of Palestine and the rights of Palestinians is a contributing factor to war and conflict; further, there should be a move from agreeing on the concept of recognizing the Palestinian state to concrete recognition and agreement of its borders. The absence of international recognition of the Palestinian state hinders the participation of the so-called “developing countries” in the institutions of global governance, which is an essential target for achieving justice, peace, and strong institutions.

Therefore, in this policy brief, we address the Slovenian foreign policy toward the Palestinian struggle; we identify two streams from 2018 to 2019 and after the government change in 2020 to April 2022. Based on these two scenarios, we give recommendations on how the Slovenian foreign policy can contribute to peace rather than the escalation of militarization, oppression and the occupation in the Palestinian occupied territories and Gaza Strip.

The policy of deliberate ambiguity contributes to the oppression and conflicts in the Palestinian territories, which hinders the pursuit of SDG16: Peace, justice, and strong institutions.

Only nine out of twenty-seven EU member states have recognized Palestine. In 2014, Sweden became the first country to recognize Palestine as an EU member state. Swedish recognition of the Palestinian state and the announcement of the first feminist foreign policy worldwide was followed by diplomatic crises between Sweden and Israel. These crises can be eliminated if more countries publicly recognize Palestine and Palestinian rights as essential for peace and ceasing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Recognizing the state of Palestine is vital to strengthen the role of Palestine in the Middle-East peace process. Target **16.3 of SDG16** promotes the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensures equal access to justice for all, and target **16.8** aims to broaden and strengthen the participation of the so-called “developing countries” in the institutions of global governance; therefore, recognizing the state of Palestine is essential

to opening a just platform where Palestinians can be presented equally in the international negotiations for peace and security.

Without stopping the occupation of Palestine and without affirming the Palestinian rights, there will be a continuous struggle in the Middle East. International donorship has tightened support for NGOs in the Palestinian territories in order not to lose diplomatic relations with the Israeli occupation in Palestine; the silence of the international community on the violations of the Palestinian right to exist will contribute to the problem and the increase of violence in the Middle East based on the “no solution/solution” approach.” Israel is the strongest side in this conflict regarding its armed forces and the support it gains from the United States of America. Taking the strongest side of the conflict will worsen the violations of human rights. It will hinder peace, sustainable development, and justice due to global burdens as a result of the continued displacement of Palestinians. The displacement of Palestinians contributes to forced migration which is an obstacle to achieving equality and safe passages for all migrants, which are important for achieving the Agenda 2030.

The implications of the Slovenian foreign policy toward Palestine from 2018 to 2019

Slovenia does not recognize the Palestinian state. The issue of recognizing the Palestinian state has been pending in the country’s parliament since 2014. In Slovenia, the legislative branch decides on foreign policies, like recognizing states, after the foreign affairs committee votes on the matter. In 2018, the prime minister of Slovenia at the time declared that Slovenia’s recognition of Palestine was not uncertain, but it was a matter of time. The committee on foreign policy did not take a vote due to the lack of governmental proposal on the issue regardless of the prime minister’s call to act to recognize the state of Palestine.

The proposal to recognize the state of Palestine by Slovenia was strengthened along with other EU countries as a response to Trump’s declaration of making Jerusalem the capital of Israel. Upon this unjust declaration, there was a lot of violence and displacement of Palestinians in east Jerusalem like in the case of Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood. The hesitancy of Slovenia, along with other EU countries, in concretely and rapidly acknowledging the Palestinian right to self-determination contributed to the escalation of violence. The United Nations and the EU declined Trump’s declaration. Yet, they did not take concrete actions of recognizing the Palestinian state or condemning the Israeli ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in east Jerusalem.

The two-state solution and the borders of 1967 seem the closest to the right of self-determination by the Palestinians; Slovenia announced its support for the right of self-determination and its will to recognize the Palestinian state, yet it did not take any official steps to support the rights of Palestinians; mentioning good will and intentions did not stop the occupation and displacement of Palestinians. Therefore, we may conclude that the Slovenian foreign policy toward justice in Palestine from 2018 to 2019 was a policy of deliberate ambiguity that does not efficiently contribute to peace and justice in Palestine.

The implications of the Slovenian foreign policy toward Palestine from 2020 to April 2022

In 2020, Marjan Šarec, the former prime minister of Slovenia, resigned. The opposition led by the Slovenian Democratic Party, SDS managed to form a coalition, where Janez Janša, the president of SDS, became the new prime minister. An early election did not happen despite protests that demanded it. The demonstrations continued every week, and they interacted with local and foreign issues. In November 2020, Slovenia voted against the World Health Organization resolution which would aim to secure access to healthcare amid the pandemic for residents of the occupied Palestinian territory and Syrian Golan. Upon this vote, the Movement for the Rights of Palestinian, a Slovenian NGO, accused the government of supporting apartheid and occupation. The prime minister of Slovenia publicly condemned the protests in Bosnia and Herzegovina that supported the rights of Palestinian; by this, the foreign policy of Slovenia supported apartheid and occupation and implemented the concept of nesting colonialism, where Slovenia acted in an imperialistic way by condemning the free will of Bosnian protesters.

The SDS-led government in Slovenia is known for its conservative policies of attacking free media and discriminatory speech like the official statement that welcomed refugees from Ukraine because they are not like the refugees from Afghanistan. The same government raised the Israeli flag during the Israeli airstrikes on Gaza in May 2021, which caused the Slovenian protestors to stand for the Palestinian rights along with their leading cause at the time – fighting the privatization of water. Thousands of Slovenians joined the march for Palestinian rights and other causes, such as stopping the law that proposed the privatization of water.

Conclusion and recommendations

In 2018, Slovenia was on its way to becoming the second EU member state to recognize the state of Palestine after Sweden did in 2014. This stance was strengthened in 2019 when Trump announced Jerusalem as the capital of Israel; upon this statement, Slovenia officially announced its support and will to recognize the state of Palestine and the Palestinian right to self-determination, yet it did not take official action. This delay and hesitancy did not support the peace process, and in the Palestinian-occupied territories, more Palestinians were displaced. In 2020, with the change of government, the prime minister publicly supported the Israeli colonial acts in Palestine, which was a significant shift along with the right-wing policies of the SDS party that attacked free media, and aimed to privatize water. Government's official Twitter account contained discriminatory speech that dehumanized refugees and asylum seekers coming from Afghanistan. The Slovenian government's decision to vote against the WHO resolution to provide aid to the Palestinians in the occupied territories in November 2020 was condemned by the Slovenian NGO Movement for Palestinian Rights. Further, the SDS-led government practiced nesting colonialism in its foreign affairs by condemning the pro-Palestinian rights protests in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Therefore, the first scenario of the Slovenian foreign policy regarding Palestine from 2018 to 2019 was associated with the policy of deliberate ambiguity. The second scenario after the government changed in 2020 supports apartheid and occupation in the context of nesting colonialism. Both ways are insufficient for the support that Slovenia may provide to achieve peace and sustainable development in Palestine; the first scenario is fair with rhetoric, yet it lacks concrete actions, and the second scenario is unjust with rhetoric and actions.

Therefore, we conclude with the following recommendations on how the Slovenian foreign policy can contribute to peace and sustainable development in Palestine:

- Officially recognize the state of Palestine by moving from deliberate ambiguity to official actions that identify the Palestinian right to self-determination;
- Support the membership of Palestine in the United Nations to create strong institutions where Palestinians are presented equally;
- Recognize the borders of 1967 for the two-state solution;
- Follow the steps of the Swedish feminist foreign policy in 2014 by condemning the apartheid and occupation practiced by the Israeli occupation forces in Palestine.





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