



Ireland's position on the recognition of a Palestinian state

“The continuing Israeli military occupation of the Palestinian territories is at the heart of the unresolved Arab-Israeli conflict. The issues which have been critical for Israel for most of its history – the existence of the state of Israel and its right to live in peace and security – have for many years been accepted in principle by most Arab and Palestinian opinion. It is the continuing occupation, and the creation and growth of illegal settlements on the occupied lands, which are now the major obstacles to peace.

“I consider it an urgent priority objective, both for Ireland and the EU, to help achieve the end of the occupation and the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state, living in peace alongside Israel. This has been the consistent view of Irish Governments since 1980. It is long overdue, and it remains my view that there should be a state of Palestine, and very soon.” [\[1\]](#)

Those were the words of Eamon Gilmore, Tánaiste and Minister of Foreign Affairs & Trade, speaking in Dáil Éireann on 13 July 2011. There, the Minister rightly blames Israel's military occupation and colonisation of Palestinian territories for the failure to achieve a “two-state solution”.

UN membership for Palestine

The Minister was answering a question requesting his views on UN membership for a Palestinian state, an application for which is to be made by Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, on 20 September 2011.

It is now more than two decades since the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) declared the establishment of a Palestinian state on the 1967 borders, that is, in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. With this declaration, Palestinians accepted the objective of a state on just 22% of their historic homeland, with Israel continuing to exist in the other 78% - and the way was now open to a “two-state solution”.

In response, close to a hundred states in the world recognised it and granted it full diplomatic relations. Other states, including Ireland, while not going as far as recognition, established some form of diplomatic relations with it. In January 2011, the Irish Government upgraded this representation to the status of a Mission, which is one step short of the Embassy status appropriate for a state that has been accorded full recognition.

UN membership is granted by the UN General Assembly (where a two-thirds majority of those present and voting is required) on the recommendation of the Security Council.

It is expected that the US will veto the Palestinian application in the Security Council and therefore the matter will never reach the General Assembly.

In this event, Palestinians are expected to apply for observer rights at the UN as a "non-member state", which requires a simple majority in the General Assembly and cannot be blocked by the US.

As far back as 1974, the General Assembly recognised the PLO as "the representative of the Palestinian people" and granted it observer rights at the UN. At present, Palestine has a permanent mission at the UN with observer rights, but as a liberation movement, not as a state with internationally recognised territory.

How will Ireland vote?

So, in the UN General Assembly this autumn, Ireland will have the opportunity to vote on a Palestinian application to become a member state of the UN, or, more likely, a "non-member state" with observer rights at the UN.

How will Ireland vote? Here's what the Minister said on the issue in Dáil Éireann on 13 July 2011:

"[T]here is no proposal on the table on which we can take a view, although our general support for the establishment of a Palestinian state is well known. In discussions at EU level, however, I have agreed with the view that assuring either side now of our support would be premature and simply reduce the incentive on them to return to real talks, which is the more important objective.

"As I have stated in answer to previous questions, if the issue of recognition arises at the United Nations in the autumn, the Government will consider Ireland's response very carefully. We will take into account factors such as Ireland's long-standing support for the achievement of a Palestinian state, the exact terms and nature of what may be proposed, the positions of EU partners and other friends, the progress on the wider peace process, and our assessment of the practical impact of any such decision."

There, the Minister reserved Ireland's position on the issue, as have other EU members. On 19 July 2011, UK Foreign Secretary, William Hague, told the House of Commons:

"We have reserved our position on the question of recognition. I discussed it again with my European Union colleagues in Brussels yesterday, and we have all agreed that we will reserve our position ..." [\[2\]](#)

Plainly, at the time of writing, it is unclear if the Government has arrived at a position on this issue, let alone what that position is, since along with his EU colleagues the Minister has taken a vow of silence on the matter.

It is important to note that the Minister said that, in coming to a decision, Ireland will take into account "the positions of EU partners", amongst other factors. This implies that the Minister does not expect that there will be a common EU position and that therefore Ireland will make up its own mind on the issue.

David Morrison
5 September 2011

References

[1] debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/2011/07/13/00011.asp

[2] www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm110719/debtext/110719-0001.htm

Sadaka supports a peaceful settlement in Israel/Palestine based on the principles of democracy and justice, be that in two states or in one state. We maintain an independent position on internal politics within Palestine, favouring neither Fatah, Hamas nor any other Palestinian political organisation.