

the conflict. In addition to the loss of life and material damage, the hostilities are cementing the animosity and hatred between the two peoples with each passing day, making the need to end the fighting all the more urgent. An urgent need appears to create conditions for a sustainable peace based on the following principles:

The Gaza war should be brought to a halt in the shortest time possible. It should be the last war ever fought between Israel and the Palestinians. To this end, the aim of any peace agreement must be strategic coexistence between the parties, based on the two-state solution, in line with all relevant UN resolutions.

Relations between Israel and Palestine must be conducted within the boundaries of the rule of international law and respect for human rights. These principles are non-negotiable and should be considered the fundamental framework of the political thrust to transform the historical enmity between the Israelis and the Palestinians into viable coexistence. International recognition of the State of Palestine and its acceptance as a full member of the UN should precede and must be separated from the success or failure of the peace process with Israel. The two protagonists in the negotiations should be granted equal international recognition. The State of Palestine should include the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, with East Jerusalem as its official capital.

Full Palestinian membership in the UN will be based on compliance with the UN Charter, specifically Chapter II, Articles 4.1 and 4.2, which govern membership. If the Palestinian Authority is deemed to be deficient in meeting the terms, a roadmap with an affixed timetable should be drafted to guide the Palestinian Authority in making the necessary reforms.

The international community must draft a political roadmap that will establish the terms of reference of the negotiations as well as a timetable for their conclusion. Incentives — but also disincentives — should be offered by the international community to the negotiating parties to bolster domestic support for the negotiations.

UN Security Council Resolution 2334 should be revisited and fortified by a new resolution that builds on the principles adopted in December 2016 and reframes them in the context of geopolitical developments since its adoption. Similarly, the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative should be updated to reflect regional changes over the past two decades. Together, a new UN Security Council resolution and an updated Arab Peace Initiative should serve as the basis for the diplomatic scheme.

The Spanish position

The Spanish Parliament called upon the government to recognise the State of Palestine on 18 November 2014. This was less than one month after the Swedish centre-left coalition, led by the Labour Party, recognised the State of Palestine, shortly after gaining power. Also, the Spanish decision came a few weeks after the British and the Irish parliaments registered such a call upon their governments.

One day before the Madrid vote, two Palestinian fighters attacked an Israeli Jerusalem synagogue and killed four Jews at prayer. As a result of the attack, the original text of the non-binding parliamentary motion was altered. The initial text 'urged' the Spanish government 'to recognise' Palestine, but the then ruling Popular Party (PP), which held an absolute majority in the lower house, proposed an amendment to weaken the wording. The amended resolution appeared less ambitious than the original one and was accepted by an overall majority. The final text said: 'The Spanish Parliament urges the



More than 3,000 people form a human mosaic representing the Palestinian flag in Guernica, Spain, on December 8, 2023.
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government to recognise Palestine as a state'. It also added: 'This recognition must be the consequence of a negotiation process between the parties', an addition that watered down the call to a certain extent. The wide media attention to the softened Spanish text was mostly due to the vocal denunciation that followed from Israel.

The Spanish move of 2014, that reflected the mounting frustration in Spain and the EU as a whole at Israel's expanding settlements and the collapse of the US-sponsored peace talks, brought about additional calls of eight more Western European parliaments for the recognition of the State of Palestine. Israel reacted to all these calls very negatively, exposing the growing fear in Israel of the legitimisation of a Palestinian state. It also reflected the eroding support inside Israel for the two-state solution.

The Western European pro-recognition momentum throughout 2014 collapsed on 5 January 2015. The terror attack by ISIS in Paris brought about negative feelings towards the

The recognition issue and sanctions on settlers in 2024

Only four Western European countries have recognised Palestine so far: Iceland, Malta, Cyprus and Sweden. Only three of them (Malta, Cyprus and Sweden) are members of the EU. Only one of them (Sweden) recognised Palestine after joining the EU. Altogether, nine EU member states have recognised Palestine, but the recognition of the Eastern European countries could be seen as only partially valid as it was done long ago, under different international circumstances.

Internationally, 139 countries out of the 193 member-states of the UN have recognised Palestine as a state. Furthermore, in 2012 it was recognised as a state also by the UN General Assembly, but it failed to gain recognition as a full member state. In order to become a full member state, Palestine needs the approval of at least two-thirds of the UN General Assembly's members and of at least nine of the 15 members of the UN Security Council, with no vetoes from

tries are already considering this as an option: Spain is one of them.

For Israel, the recognition of the State of Palestine by friendly countries is very worrying. The last thing this Israeli cabinet wants to see is Palestinian statehood legitimised internationally (I would even say that for today's Israeli leadership this is no less than a nightmare). The levelling of Israel's and Palestine's legal status in the international arena — that is seen internationally as the gate to peace — is viewed in Israel as a diplomatic blow. A Spanish recognition of Palestine at this stage can ignite the momentum that might lead to overall European and UN recognition. Spain's Prime Minister, Pedro Sánchez, recently announced his intention of recognising the State of Palestine before the summer, and to support its full membership of the UN. If the Spanish Council of Ministers approves the recognition of Palestine, Spain would become a meaningful player towards a new diplomatic momentum on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in line with its previous effort

The author, a former director general of Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, lays down the reasons for recognising the State of Palestine in order to create the conditions for a sustainable peace between Israelis and Palestinians.



Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas (C) shakes hand with Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez (L) and the Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo at the offices of the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah, West Bank, on November 23, 2023.
AFP

Muslim world. As a result, the readiness to support the Palestinian cause also faded away. The mood in European parliaments changed as a result of the comparison that Israel's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, drew between ISIS and Hamas. In retrospect, ISIS terrorism inflicted substantial damage on the Palestinian cause.

The 2014 recognition momentum came to a clear halt for almost a full decade until the catastrophic 2023-24 Gaza war.

the five permanent members, which is so far a very high hurdle. As of today, the State of Palestine can sit as an observer at the UN General Assembly meetings but not vote.

The war that broke out on October 7 2023 has changed dramatically Israel's international standing. The world is now more critical of Israel and more vocal in its support for Palestinian self-determination. It seems as if this can bring about the renewal of the Palestinian recognition momentum. Some Western European coun-

tries are already considering this as an option: Spain is one of them.

When it hosted the Madrid Peace Conference on the Middle East in 1991. Another, though smaller, worry for the Israeli cabinet at the moment are the sanctions imposed on extremist Israeli settlers who have violently attacked or committed human rights abuses against Palestinians in the West Bank. In Israel, this is considered to be related to the issue of Palestinian recognition. Leaders of the Israeli settlers are seen by the nationalistic part of the Israeli so-

ciety as its modern pioneers — in other words, as its national heroes—. Restrictions on travelling to friendly countries or on the ability to register bank accounts by prominent settlers are seen as an international delegitimation of the settlements and of Israel's control of the West Bank as a whole. Six countries have already taken such measures recently: the US, the UK, Canada, France, New Zealand and Spain. Also, the EU reached a political agreement in March to sanction extremist Israeli settlers. It is hard to tell if this is a beginning of a new international trend, but if it is, it might push forward the Western tendencies in favour of the recognition of Palestine.

Conclusions

The events of October 7 and those that followed exposed how irresponsible it was for the international community to neglect one of the most dangerous and volatile conflict areas on earth. The war that broke out that day has changed dramatically Israel's international standing. The world is now more critical of Israel and more vocal in its support for Palestinian self-determination. It seems as if this can bring about the renewal of the momentum for Palestinian recognition. Some Western European countries are already considering this an option, Spain among them.

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