



# Weekly Briefing

**Slovenia External Relations briefing:  
Perspectives of External Relations in 2018 in Slovenia**  
**Helena Motoh**

## China-CEE Institute

Kiadó: Kína-KKE Intézet Nonprofit Kft.  
Szerkesztésért felelős személy: Chen Xin  
Kiadásért felelős személy: Huang Ping

 1052 Budapest Petőfi Sándor utca 11.  
 +36 1 5858 690  
 [office@china-cee.eu](mailto:office@china-cee.eu)  
 [china-cee.eu](http://china-cee.eu)

## **Briefing on the perspectives of external relations in 2018 in Slovenia**

The end of 2017 and the beginning of the new year were marked by several foreign policy issues. Most notably, there were incidents regarding the unresolved conflict with the neighboring Croatia about the implementation of the arbitration court decision on the sea border. Apart from the regional relations, on the other hand, a diplomatic note was issued by the People Republic of China regarding the incorrect procedures in the police investigation of a phone-fraud network operating in Slovenia, where One China Policy was not correctly implemented. In the previous days, however, another issue resurfaced, which might also be of long-lasting consequences. The minister of Foreign Affairs proposed that the parliament finally passes the decision on the recognition of the state of Palestine. The government and parliament are still debating the issue and there are also several key factors from abroad trying to influence the decision. The decision about the recognition of Palestine might for Slovenia become a wider external policy decision with implications beyond the Palestinian issue.

### **History and background of the issue:**

After 1991 independence, Slovenia had to reassess its relations with Israel and its standpoint on the issue of Palestine. The former Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia was very much involved in the question of Palestine from the very beginning. Already in the preparation of the determining UN General Assembly Resolution 181 (II), Yugoslavia was together with India and Iran actively promoting the model of the Federal State of Palestine. The three countries eventually decided for different votes in the final procedure in November 1947, Iran and India voted against, while Yugoslavia abstained. Despite the objections, Yugoslavia recognized the State of Israel few days after its formal declaration in May 1948. After the Suez crisis the ties between Tito

and Nasser grew stronger and the Yugoslav relations to Israel more critical, until they were brought to an official end because of the June war in 1967. In the meanwhile, the framework of the non-aligned movement was already formed, which determined the Yugoslav alliance with Egypt and a stronger standpoint against the Israeli actions in the Middle East region. Yugoslavia also voted for the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 3236 in November 1974, which affirmed that the Palestinian people have a right to self-determination, national independence and sovereignty in Palestine. Further it also supported the official proclamation of the establishment of the State of Palestine by the Palestinian Declaration of Independence in November 1988.

### **Positions of Slovenia on the status of Palestine after 1991**

After the break-up of SFRY, the formerly Yugoslav nations took different paths in their relation towards Palestine. Serbia is recognizing Palestine from the beginning of the Yugoslav separation process, when it was the successor of the name Yugoslavia, and Montenegro, when it became independent from that state in 2006, also re-confirmed the recognition of Palestine. Bosnia and Herzegovina recognized Palestine in 1992. Slovenia, Croatia and Macedonia refrained from doing so, although at least Slovenia and Croatia have declaratively supported the Palestinian demands. Slovenia has, however, established a representative diplomatic office in Ramala after the 1993 Oslo Accords.

The November 2012 United Nations General Assembly resolution 67/19, adopted on the 65th anniversary of the Resolution 181(II), aimed to upgrade Palestine to non-member observer state status in the United Nations. It was an important milestone in the profiling of the countries' standpoint on the Palestine issue. The vote, which took place just after the Israeli offensive on Gaza, divided EU in three groups. Out of all EU members, only Czech Republic was among the 9 countries which were against the resolution. Other EU members were almost equally divided among the group that voted for the resolution and the group that abstained. Slovenia, which at the time was led by the right-wing

SDS-led government, abstained after very little political debate on the issue. A group of NGOs appealed with a public letter to the president, Danilo Türk, and a petition. Since this vote happened during the time of the serious government crisis due to the anti-government rally movement, media attention on the issue faded away fairly quickly.

In the new government coalition, the issue was brought up again by the opposition left wing political party United Left (ZL) in autumn 2014, after Sweden decided on recognition on October 30. The proposal by the United Left was brought before the Parliamentary committee for foreign affairs where the issue got a general support by most of the political parties, with the exception of the opposition right wing Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS). After some miscommunication, two other decision proposals were brought forward, one from ZaAB (Alenka Bratušek party) and the other from the leading government Modern Centre Party (SMC). SMC proposal set no time schedule for the recognition and as presented by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Karl Erjavec, the government view was also that the recognition of Palestine would happen only after “the circumstances are thoroughly examined”. The debate also focused on the procedure, the government advocating the involvement of the government in the procedure as opposed to the initial idea that the parliament could pass the decision independently. When the vote finally happened, it was seen as a surprise. Despite the general support for the recognition decision, the votes for the initiative were only two. The alternative proposal of SMC was then taken into account, proposing the parliament to first pass the issue on to the government and then act upon the government decision only, when the government proposes the parliamentary decision on the recognition. Another important conclusion of the Parliamentary committee for foreign affairs was made, namely, that all necessary activities must be undertaken to promote the forming of the common EU position on the recognition of Palestine. In addition to this second conclusion a decision was made to support the future applications for the membership of Palestine in any international organizations and their

agencies (without doubt a response to the abstention in 2012 General Assembly vote).

### **January 2018 Proposal for the recognition of Palestine**

Ever since the 2014 failed vote the position of the SMC-lead government was that Slovenia will coordinate its policy towards Palestine with a general EU consensus and will not act on its own. In the past two months a new initiative appeared which goes contrary to this official government position. The initiative was taken by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Karl Erjavec, following the appeal by the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, in the informal meeting with the Federica Mogherini, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and the EU foreign ministers in the margins of the Foreign Affairs Council. The position of the European Council was presented by Mogherini, who especially stated the EC support for the two-state solution, opposition of the illegal settlement activity, and the appeal for the both sides in the conflict to engage with the international community for a negotiated outcome.

After the meeting, Minister Erjavec started the initiative to bring the proposal again on the table of the Parliamentary Committee for Foreign affairs. The proposal will not be the one proposed in 2014 by the group of MP of the United Left party, but a proposal formulated by the government. Minister Erjavec claims that the proposal is already formed and was coordinated with the President of the Parliament Milan Brglez, himself a SMC member, but a stronger supporter of the recognition of Palestine than the SMC president and Prime Minister Miro Cerar.

The reactions on this initiative came from different sides. On the side of the government, the position on the proposal, and especially on its immediate implementation, is still unclear, and there are also speculations that the present government, especially the SMC members, might try to avoid the decision by postponing the issue until the elections in June. There seems to be, however, a large support in the parliament, among the government and opposition parties,

with the exception of the right wing New Slovenia (NSi) and Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS). There are different views on the issue coming from abroad. One that resonated the most was a letter by 48 prominent Jewish organizations in USA, who appeal to PM Miro Cerar to refrain from the decision. The letter was largely seen in media as a warning with informal economic and political consequences of the decision for Slovenia. On the other hand, Minister Erjavec refers to support expressed by a group of Israeli intellectuals, supporting the Slovenian recognition of Palestine, and to the consultation with Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs who reported no particular consequences followed for Sweden after they decided to recognize Palestine. Within a larger framework of foreign affairs, this decision might position Slovenia within newly emerging relations of power, especially because it might change its relationship with USA, a strong supporter of Israeli policies towards Palestine.