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Slovenia in the vanguard of Europe's criticism of Israel

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Slovenia is the only EU member state to have joined the proceedings at the UN International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the case which the Republic of South Africa has brought against Israel. It concerns a violation of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide during the military operation in the Gaza Strip.

On 11 January, Slovenia's minister of foreign and European affairs Tanja Fajon said that the country's participation in the ICJ proceedings is a response to a "very wide array of possible violations of the law" by Israel against the Palestinian population. In this context, she referred to Israel's occupation of Palestinian land since the 1967 war, its systematic actions aimed at modifying the demographic composition of the population living in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and the administrative measures it has taken to discriminate against the Palestinians residing there. Slovenia, which in 2024–25 is a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, has announced that its delegation would deliver a statement during the proceedings at the ICJ on 23 February.

Commentary

- Slovenia's critical attitude towards Israel has recently been manifested by the Robert Golob government, which consists of a 'green-pink-red' coalition including the Freedom Movement (GS), the Social Democrats (SD) and the Left (Levica) and has been in power since 2022. This has been the first instance of this cabinet taking a stance which differs significantly from the EU's dominant foreign policy line, as mainly represented by large states such as Germany. Until recently, the government strongly supported ideas such as closer European integration and the reform of the EU voting system. Its attitude towards the present stage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict results from the views held by the coalition's left-wing electorate. These include a critical stance on the foreign policy pursued by the US and Israel, which is referred to as neo-colonial; a positive attitude towards societies of the Global South; and pacifist ideas. To some degree these are a legacy from the Yugoslav era, including the strategy of Yugoslavia's non-involvement in the fight between political blocs during the Cold War era and its support for developing countries. Pro-Palestinian attitudes are particularly evident in statements by politicians and supporters of the SD (Minister Fajon is a member of this party) and the Left.
- The approach of Slovenia's government and a portion of its elite to the conflict in the Gaza Strip is also a manifestation of their strong intention to distance themselves from the previous centre-right government led by Janez Janša, which emphasised Slovenia's political and economic partnership with Israel, as well as its close relations with Prime

Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. For example, both states sought to make the port of Koper a gateway for Israeli goods entering the European market. Janša repeatedly referred to Arab organisations fighting with Israel as terrorists, and during the previous crises in the Middle East he ordered the Israeli flag to be flown at the headquarters of the Slovenian Democratic Party (which he leads) as a sign of solidarity with that country.

- The present government's approach was also likely influenced by pro-Palestinian demonstrations held in Ljubljana which gathered several hundred protestors. Prominent representatives of Slovenia's political and intellectual elite, such as the first president of independent Slovenia Milan Kučan (1991–2002) and the well-known philosopher Slavoj Žižek, have also criticised Israel's Middle Eastern policy. However, the Slovenian public seems to be divided on this issue. According to a poll conducted in November 2023, 19% of the respondents wanted Slovenia to support Palestine alone in the recent conflict, 21% Israel alone, 40% were in favour of a neutral stance and 20% believed that Ljubljana could act as a mediator between the warring sides.