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The Baltic States and the Israeli–Palestinian Issue

France, the United Kingdom, and Canada have announced that they will decide on the recognition of Palestine as an independent state at the next session of the UN General Assembly. The Baltic states do not currently anticipate a similar step. Meanwhile, as the international community intensifies its calls for a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, Israel's representatives are actively seeking the support of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia for their ongoing actions. In recent weeks, Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar (1–3 July 2025) and President Isaac Herzog (4–7 August 2025) have visited Vilnius, Riga, and Tallinn.

International context. At present, Palestine has official recognition as an independent state from 147 of the 193 UN member states. European and G7 countries have not yet reached a decision. Recently, France, the United Kingdom, Canada, Malta, and Australia announced the possibility of recognising a Palestinian state if Israel does not agree to both a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and provide humanitarian aid. A decision of this nature could be made at the next (80th) session of the UN General Assembly, which is scheduled to take place on 9 September 2025. From 28–30 July, the UN hosted the High-Level International Conference for the Peaceful Settlement of the Palestine Question and the Implementation of the Two-State Solution¹. During this event, the co-chairs of the Foreign Ministers of France and Saudi Arabia called for support for this course of action. Since the outbreak of hostilities between Israel and Hamas on 7 October 2023, the following countries have recognised Palestine: Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, the Bahamas, Spain, Norway, Ireland, Slovenia, Armenia (in 2024), and Mexico (in 2025). Israeli officials have expressed strong disapproval of announcements by Western countries regarding recognition of Palestine. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu emphasised that such a decision would constitute a “reward for Hamas terrorists”. US President Donald Trump also criticised the plans of the European leaders.

The act of recognition, as an expression of each state's free decision, would grant the Palestinians independence and the right to make decisions within their own territory. However, it should be noted that international recognition is largely symbolic and does not imply automatic sovereignty, as this depends on the end of Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory.

Diplomatic visits to the Baltic states. In early July of this year, Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar visited Vilnius, Riga, and Tallinn. During his visit, he met with his counterparts to discuss bilateral cooperation, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and the situation in the Middle East. In early August, President Isaac Herzog met with the heads of state of Lithuania – Gitanas Nausėda, Latvia – Edgars Rinkēvičs, and Estonia – Alar Karis. The visits to the three Baltic states were intended to gain international support for Israel's efforts to release hostages held by Hamas, strengthen bilateral ties, including economic and security matters, and increase pressure on the Iranian regime.

The Baltic states have maintained close relations with Israel for many years. Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia regard it as a significant political, military, and economic partner. It is important to note that they condemn Hamas's terrorist attacks and affirm Israel's right to defend itself in accordance with international regulations. At the same time, they are calling for urgent action to resolve the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip.

The Baltic states have expressed particular interest in military cooperation with Israel, including its experience in protecting civilians, recruitment, the use of high-tech products, and the installation of innovative defence

¹ With reference to the 1947 UN resolution (no. 181) on the partition of Palestine into two separate, independent states.

systems. The countries also plan to cooperate more closely in the areas of space technology transfer, biotechnology, green energy, and joint research initiatives in the high-tech and sustainable food industries. During Herzog's visit to Vilnius, Lithuania and Israel signed three memoranda of understanding on strengthening partnerships in research, development, and innovation, and promoting cooperation in the manufacturing and industrial sectors. Also, an Israeli embassy was recently opened in Tallinn.

The dynamic relationship between Israel and the Baltic states has been in place for over a dozen months. In November 2023, the President of Latvia, Edgars Rinkēvičs, paid a working visit to Israel. During this visit, he met with President Herzog, family members of civilians held hostage by Hamas terrorists, and Latvian citizens living in the country. In February 2025, the President of Estonia visited Israel and Palestine, and in April, the Minister of National Defence of Lithuania, Dovilė Šakalienė, visited Israel.

The Baltic States' position on the Palestinian issue. None of the Baltic states have officially recognised Palestine or established diplomatic relations. However, all parties support the two-state solution, although no decisions are planned in this regard in the near future. The President of Lithuania explained that achieving long-term peace in the Middle East is a prerequisite for further progress. In a similar vein, the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has stated that while Latvia supports a two-state resolution, as agreed through negotiations and approved by the UN Security Council, the recognition of a Palestinian state is not a matter of government interest. Latvian President Edgars Rinkēvičs is of the opinion that, in the current circumstances, recognising Palestine would not contribute to genuine normalisation. The President of Estonia, Alar Karis, has also expressed support for resolving the crisis in Gaza through the establishment of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel. He asserts that "a nation that desires independence cannot be denied it," but that achieving it is contingent on the establishment of lasting peace and the implementation of effective governance institutions in Palestine.

Conclusions. High-level diplomatic visits to the Baltic states have coincided with mounting international criticism of Israel's military offensive in the Gaza Strip. Sa'ar and Herzog's mission, aimed at ensuring the support of its allies in the face of Israel's deteriorating position in the EU and the threat of isolation, met with only partial success. Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, which traditionally have maintained more amicable relations with Israel than some EU member states, currently have no plans to recognise a Palestinian state. The experience of Soviet occupation in the Baltic states and the threat from Russia provide the ideological basis for cooperation with Israel (in the context of Iran). All states also share a common goal of countering the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and supporting Ukraine in its war with Russia. Although the Baltic states have pledged support for Israel in its war against Hamas, their official narrative can be characterised as cautious criticism, as they have sent a clear signal to their Middle Eastern ally that Israel must take immediate action to promote stability and peace. The stance towards Israel has exposed significant internal governmental divisions in Latvia. Specifically, one of the coalition parties – the Progressives – has called on the Prime Minister to "unequivocally condemn the human rights violations committed by the Israeli government against Palestinian civilians." The Baltic states also endorsed the joint statement issued by Western states on 21 July, expressing strong disapproval of Israel's restrictions on humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip and calling for immediate peace in the region. This statement was preceded by an appeal on 19 May, calling on Israel to allow the delivery of food aid to the Gaza Strip and other support provided by the UN and non-governmental organisations.

It is important to note that these official visits by Israeli leaders took place against the backdrop of public demonstrations against the illegal occupation of the Gaza Strip and demanding the imposition of targeted sanctions on the Israeli government and military. However, the Israeli-Palestinian issue has not received much public attention in the Baltic states. For instance, a survey conducted in 2024 by Baltic Research / LRT revealed that only approximately 30% of respondents supported Lithuania's recognition of a Palestinian state, while nearly 40% expressed no opinion on the matter.