

Irish and Spanish leaders announce plans to recognize the State of Palestine



??????Irish Prime Minister Simon Harris (left) welcomes Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez

Dublin, April 13 (RHC)-- Irish and Spanish leaders have said the time when a group of six European countries officially recognizes Palestine as a state is coming closer. New Irish Prime Minister Simon Harris and his Spanish counterpart Pedro Sanchez on Friday affirmed their commitment to "recognize Palestine as a state as soon as possible, when the conditions are appropriate."

Harris and Sanchez announced during a joint press conference in Government Buildings in Dublin. Harris said the EU states agreed last month that they would move to recognize Palestine when the conditions were right.

"That point is coming much closer and we would like to move together. The people of Palestine have long sought the dignity of their own country and sovereignty," he said. "When we move forward, we would like to do so with as many others as possible. And then we send a decision to the people of Israel," he added.

Harris added that the people of Palestine deserved equal respect. "In a region where people of all faiths and traditions came together in peace, I know that is our shared aim." The Irish leader said both Irish and Spanish nations are "strongly committed to the vision of a two-state solution with Israel and Palestine living in peace and in security side by side."

Iceland, Sweden, Poland, the Czech Republic and Romania are among the countries to have already given legal recognition to a Palestinian state.

Sanchez said it was not possible at present to say when the countries would move to recognize the Palestinian state.

"As of now, no one can discern clearly the phases or times for the process. We are in uncharted terrain," he said.

The comments came hours after Norway announced during a visit by Sanchez that it too was ready to recognize a Palestinian state.

The Spanish leader is currently on a European tour, which is aimed at boosting support for the move, a Spanish government spokesperson said.

Harris became Ireland's prime minister this week after previous Prime Minister Leo Varadkar unexpectedly quit last month. Ireland has frequently stated to recognize a Palestinian state and its new leader appears eager to make good on the pledge.

"Let me this evening say our assessment is that that point is coming much closer and we would like to move together in doing so," Harris said at the joint press conference with Sanchez. "When we move forward, we would like to do so with as many others as possible to lend weight to the decision and to send the strongest message," Harris added.

"The people of Palestine have long sought the dignity of their own country and sovereignty -- a home that like Ireland and Spain can take its place amongst the nations of the earth," he added. Sanchez noted that enthusiastic countries would announce their decision "when the conditions are appropriate" and that they would support the new Palestinian state becoming "a full member of the United Nations."

Earlier, Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store said the decision would be closely coordinated with "like-minded countries." "Norway stands ready to recognize the state of Palestine," Store told a joint press conference with Sanchez. "We have not set a firm timetable," he added.

Norway's parliament passed a resolution in November to be prepared to recognize an independent Palestinian state.

On the sidelines of an EU leaders summit on March 22, Spain, Ireland, Malta and Slovenia issued a statement saying they were "ready to recognize Palestine" when "the circumstances are right."

Sanchez said last week during a Middle East tour that he hoped it would happen by the end of June.

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