**More European countries speak out against ICC despite EU support**

By: Lahav Harkov

Jerusalem Post

February 16, 2021

<https://www.jpost.com/international/more-european-countries-speak-out-against-icc-despite-eu-support-659145>

Austria and Lithuania joined the countries speaking out against the International Criminal Court’s ruling that it can investigate Israel on Tuesday, despite the European Union declaring its unwavering support.

"Austria's legal view remains unchanged," the Foreign Ministry in Vienna stated. "We have expressed our concerns in an amicus curiae brief to the Court.

"We do not recognize Palestine as a state and we reaffirm that the ICC decision does not change the status of Palestine under international law, nor does it prejudge the question of future borders," the Austrian Foreign Ministry stated.

Lithuania's Foreign Ministry tweeted it "believes in a two-state solution achieved through direct negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians.

"While supporting the work of the ICC, it is essential to avoid any politicization of the Court, which could diminish its ability to carry out its primary mission," the tweet reads.

Earlier this month, the ICC’s Pre-Trial Chamber ruled that its chief prosecutor can investigate war crimes allegations in Gaza, the West Bank and east Jerusalem committed since June 13, 2014. The investigation includes Operation Protective Edge and settlement activity.

An EU spokesman said last week that it “has taken careful note” of the ruling, while expressing strong support for the Court.

“Both the ICC and its prosecutor are independent and impartial judicial institutions with no political objectives to pursue,” EU Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs Peter Stano told the European Jewish Press.

“The EU is a strong supporter of the ICC and of its independence. All EU Member States have ratified the Rome Statute. The EU reaffirms its long-standing position in support of a negotiated two-state solution based on the internationally agreed parameters. In order for this to be possible, unilateral actions from either side should be avoided and international law upheld.”

Yet before Austria and Lithuania, other EU member states, Germany and Hungary, released statements criticizing the ruling.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said: “Our legal view on jurisdiction of the ICC regarding alleged crimes committed in the Palestine territories remains unchanged. The court has no jurisdiction, because of the absence of the element of Palestinian statehood required by international law.”

Maas added that Germany supports the ICC in general, as well as the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó wrote on Facebook that “Hungary does not agree with this decision. During the legal procedure, we already signaled that, according to our position, Palestine does not have criminal jurisdiction over Israeli citizens.

“We have always supported Israel’s right to defend itself and we believe that peace in the region can only be achieved through negotiations based on mutual respect,” Szijjártó added. “The decision of the ICC does not take us closer to this.”

The Czech Foreign Ministry said it "believes that Palestine has not fulfilled yet all criteria of statehood under international law. In this context, the...decision of the ICC does not change the current international law status of Palestine in any way.

"The Czech Republic has always spoken in favor of the two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which can be achieved only through direct negotiations between both parties," the statement reads.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi have appealed to Israel’s allies around the world in recent weeks to push back against the ruling.

Australia, Germany, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Austria, Brazil, Uganda and Canada expressed their opposition to an ICC investigation of Israel before the ruling, and Jerusalem hopes to get their public support after, as well. Of that list, Uganda and Brazil have yet to comment in recent weeks.