

# Czech president said pushing for faster embassy move to Jerusalem

Interministerial working group for Israel met in February, but Prague foreign ministry opposes the move.

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Pro-Russian incumbent Milos Zeman (seated) is applauded as he celebrates his victory with his staff members after he was reelected Czech president, January 27, 2018, at the Top hotel in Prague. (AFP / RADEK MICA)

The president of the Czech Republic has said that moving his country's embassy to Jerusalem is a top priority, local media reported Thursday.

According to the Lidové noviny newspaper, Milos Zeman, who in December announced his intention to relocate the embassy from Tel Aviv, now wants to speed up the process.

Daniel Meron, Israel's ambassador to the Czech Republic, tweeted the report, asking whether the country would be the second to move its embassy to Jerusalem after the United States.

An interministerial working group met to discuss the issue at the end of February, headed by Rudolf Jindrák, director of the Foreign Department of Zeman's office, the report said. On February 27, Jindrák tweeted that the group had met to discuss the issue and that talks would continue.

However, the report also said that after consultation with its partners in the European Union, the country's foreign ministry objected to moving the embassy. The report said that the country does not currently own property in Jerusalem that would be suitable for an embassy.

In December, Zeman said that he supported US President Donald Trump's decision to move his country's embassy but was disappointed that the US had preceded his country.

"It makes me truly happy because, as I said during my visit to Israel four years ago, I would appreciate the transfer of the Czech Embassy to Jerusalem, and had it happened, we would have been the first to do so," said Zeman, who was elected to a second five-year term in office the following month. "Now we may sooner or later follow the United States. In any case, it is still better than nothing."

On December 6, Trump bucked decades of US foreign policy by formally recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital and setting in motion plans to move the US embassy there from Tel Aviv. In February the US administration announced that it would open its Jerusalem embassy in May 2018 to coincide with the 70th anniversary of Israel's independence.

After Trump's announcement, the Czech foreign ministry said it recognizes the pre-1967 West Jerusalem as the country's capital, while noting the city should be a shared capital with the Palestinians.

"The Ministry can start considering moving of the Czech embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem only based on results of negotiations with key partners in the region and in the world," it said.

On Sunday, Guatemala announced that, like the US, it would be moving its embassy to Jerusalem in May.

"In May of this year, we will celebrate Israel's 70th anniversary, and under my instructions two days after the US will move its embassy, Guatemala will return

and permanently move its embassy to Jerusalem,” President Jimmy Morales told a crowd of more than 18,000 gathered in Washington, DC, for the annual AIPAC policy conference.

Trump’s decision to move his country’s embassy, welcomed by Israel, has been condemned by leaders and foreign ministers across the world, who have said the city’s status should be determined through negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. A number of Muslim leaders have warned the move may lead to violence.

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