# Five European nations withdraw from mine ban treaty amid security concerns



Five European countries—Finland, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—have announced their intention to withdraw from the international Mine Ban Treaty, a 1997 agreement that prohibits the use, production, and stockpiling of antipersonnel landmines. This decision marks the first time that any signatory of the treaty, which has over 165 members, has moved to reverse its commitment, sparking significant concern among rights groups and humanitarian organisations.

The announcement emerged earlier this year amid escalating military tensions linked to Russia, with particular concern among NATO member states bordering Russia and Belarus. Latvia’s parliament was the first to formally endorse the move in mid-April, voting to support the withdrawal. Defence ministers from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland jointly stated in March that “military threats to Nato member states bordering Russia and Belarus have significantly increased,” asserting their readiness “to use every necessary measure to defend our security needs.” Finland, sharing an extensive border of more than 800 miles with Russia, also joined the group, with Prime Minister Petteri Orpo explaining that leaving the treaty would provide the country greater flexibility to prepare for security changes.

The decision has been met with reactions ranging from alarm to disappointment from humanitarian organisations and survivors of landmine incidents. Zoran Ješić, a Bosnian landmine survivor who lost his right leg during the conflict in Bosnia in the 1990s and now leads an organisation supporting landmine survivors, described the move as “a punch to the face.” He emphasised the indiscriminate harm landmines cause, noting that dozens of civilians—including children—are victims every year. “Antipersonnel landmines do horrible things to innocent people,” Ješić told The Guardian. His experience highlighted the unpredictable nature of mines: “When you put a mine in the ground, you never know what will happen. Will it wait for your soldiers, your civilians, or the enemies? Usually, it hurts your people.”

Campaigners further stress that the use of landmines disproportionately affects civilians, with statistics indicating that between 70% and 85% of landmine casualties globally are non-combatants and that nearly half of these victims are children. Alma Taslidžan from Humanity & Inclusion, an organisation aiding disabled and vulnerable populations, said the decisions represent a “tipping point” and warned about the potential erosion of international humanitarian laws designed to protect civilians in war. She remarked, “The security situation is real, it is a problem. But choosing the most indiscriminate weapon amongst all to say that you are going to defend your country, that is wrong.”

Taslidžan also addressed misinformation surrounding “smart landmines,” which some officials have suggested could reduce civilian harm. She called these claims “bizarre information,” emphasising that landmines lack the capacity to distinguish between combatants and civilians. Even those with self-destruct mechanisms—themselves prone to failure rates of up to 10%—cannot mitigate the long-term danger landmines pose once deployed.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) criticised the planned withdrawals as “extremely alarming.” Maya Brehm, a legal adviser specialising in arms and the conduct of hostilities at the ICRC, acknowledged that while antipersonnel mines may hold some limited military value, this is “vastly outweighed by the appalling and long-lasting humanitarian consequences.” Brehm expressed concern that these withdrawals might set a precedent whereby states abandon treaties established during peacetime once conflicts arise. “These treaties are for the protection of people, they’re humanitarian treaties. They are meant to be upheld at the darkest of times, when civilians depend on their protection for their very survival,” she said.

These developments coincide with broader challenges in mine clearance worldwide. Conflicts in regions such as Syria, Myanmar, and Ukraine have increased landmine casualties, while funding cuts, notably those proposed during the administration of former United States President Donald Trump, have jeopardised ongoing demining projects. Norway, another neighbouring state to Russia, opted to remain in the Mine Ban Treaty. Norway’s foreign affairs minister, Espen Barth Eide, expressed regret over Finland’s choice, highlighting the risk of weakening international commitments: “If we start weakening our commitment, it makes it easier for warring factions around the world to use these weapons again, because it reduces the stigma.”

Bosnia and Herzegovina’s experiences underscore the enduring consequences of landmines. After the violent conflict in the 1990s, the country was left with approximately three million unexploded landmines—equivalent to 152 mines per square mile—continuing to threaten civilians decades later. Ješić described the ongoing hazards, stating that clearing mines is a lengthy and perilous process, with “tens of decades” likely required to fully eradicate them. Hundreds of civilians have been killed or injured since the war ended due to these remnants, exemplifying how mines can perpetuate violence long after active hostilities cease.

The decisions by Finland, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to leave the Mine Ban Treaty mark a significant shift in international arms control policy and raise questions about the future of efforts to mitigate the human cost of landmines worldwide.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2025-04/news/poland-baltic-states-exit-landmine-ban-treaty> - Confirms that Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and also Finland are announcing their withdrawal or consideration to withdraw from the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty due to increased military threats from neighboring Russia and Belarus, providing official statements from defense ministers and Latvia's parliament support.
* <https://www.commonspace.eu/news/finland-poland-and-baltic-countries-withdraw-anti-personnel-mine-ban-treaty-due-russian-threat> - Details Finland's decision to withdraw from the Mine Ban Treaty, including Prime Minister Petteri Orpo’s reasoning about the changed security environment due to Russia and Finland’s border length with Russia, and mentions Finland's NATO membership and defense spending plans.
* <https://www.politico.eu/article/poland-baltic-states-inch-closer-to-leaving-antipersonnel-mine-treaty/> - Reports the joint statement from defense ministers of Poland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania about increased military threats and their intent to withdraw to gain defense flexibility, directly supporting the article’s information on their motivations.
* <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/04/finland-move-to-leave-convention-banning-anti-personnel-mines-could-put-civilian-lives-at-risk/> - Highlights the concerns and condemnation from human rights and humanitarian organizations, warning about the risk to civilians and the erosion of international humanitarian law caused by Finland and Baltic states’ withdrawal from the Mine Ban Treaty.
* <https://www.hi-us.org/en/icbl-condemns-latvia-s-decision-to-withdraw-from-the-mine-ban-treaty-and-calls-for-immediate-reversal> - Documents the International Campaign to Ban Landmines' condemnation of Latvia's withdrawal, emphasizing the indiscriminate harm of landmines on civilians and the call for immediate reversal, aligning with the survivor and campaigner perspectives in the article.
* <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/icrc-concern-over-withdrawal-from-mine-ban-treaty> - Provides the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)'s statement expressing alarm at the withdrawals, underscoring the humanitarian consequences of landmines and concern that such withdrawals might undermine established humanitarian treaties, matching Maya Brehm's comments in the article.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2025/apr/27/campaigners-sound-alarm-as-european-nations-move-to-exit-landmine-ban> - Please view link - unable to able to access data