
An action plan for the Middle East

Given the intensive discussions under way between Israel and the Palestinians, there is a real prospect of a negotiated solution to the conflict. The EU should support this new dynamic in every way it can. Federal Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier has proposed an EU action plan for the Middle East.

For years the EU has been lending active backing to the Middle East peace process. It consequently has close relations with the relevant parties and countries in the region and is the main source of funding for reconstruction and development.

At this juncture, the German Foreign Minister urged, the EU should use this position to support the current dynamic in the peace process. "In order to swiftly generate the required momentum following an Israeli-Palestinian accord and the Middle East conference planned for the autumn, Europe needs to clearly spell out what contribution it intends to make to taking this process forward." In Steinmeier's view it is crucial that the EU review all activities to determine whether they still match present needs and are commensurate with current political developments.

The point of an EU action plan would be to highlight what the EU is doing to support the process now under way. "We should do everything we can to foster the ongoing dialogue and create a favourable political environment at regional and international level." The action plan can also lend greater focus to EU activities and expertise in this connection and ensure they are geared to what the current situation requires. The EU is helping to train and equip the Palestinian police force, for example, and build democratic government structures. Its efforts are also directed to areas such as training and economic development that are of vital importance for the nation's long-term future.

At the informal summit in Lisbon on Thursday EU foreign ministers will discuss the Middle East in depth.

- [A European action plan for the Middle East. Minister Steinmeier in the Handelsblatt of 15 October 2007](#)