

## **"We have every reason to involve Syria in the stabilization process" - Interview with Federal Foreign Minister Steinmeier on the Middle East, broadcast on Deutschland radio**

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*Federal Foreign Minister Steinmeier talks to Deutschland radio about his latest trip to the Middle East, his decision to cancel the planned visit to Syria, and Germany's possible participation in a UN peacekeeping force, the subject of consultations today in New York. The Chancellor will inform the party leaders this evening about current planning.*

Frank-Walter Steinmeier: I still think that parliament's decision is what counts, and we have to respect that. We have informed the Secretary-General of this decision-making procedure, and there are no insurmountable expectations on the German Government to come to a final decision this evening.

*Question: Has something gone wrong over the past few days with the order in which things have happened, i.e. that the outlines of the German contribution already seemed visible, for example the surveillance of the Lebanese and Israeli coast, the securing of the Lebanese-Syrian border, and the deployment of army engineers? Germany was to provide a force of 1000. In other words there were highly concrete plans, bypassing the Bundestag, as you said, which already appeared to be so definite that the MPs could feel snubbed?*

Firstly, of course, I think it is necessary for those Federal Ministries who could possibly provide contributions to discuss preliminary ideas. But I don't like such ideas being discussed in public before we as a government can present the Bundestag with a proposal. So I say, let's follow the usual procedure, first discuss ideas within the government and then inform parliament and, if necessary, request its approval.

*I assume you recently also talked with our Arab partners Jordan and Saudi Arabia about their, and indeed Germany's, contributions to the implementation of Resolution 1701. What contributions will they probably make, and what do they in turn expect from Germany?*

All our partners expect something from Germany, but from our talks I can also tell you that almost all their governments are at a similar stage of decision-making to ourselves regarding what proposals to put forward at the next UN meeting. The next important steps will be that the UN first develops a command structure within which these contributions can be coordinated, and then above all works out an international division of responsibilities, because it would of course not be a good idea if all the countries sent field hospitals, for example; the tasks will be much more diverse.

And let me add that all this cannot be forced upon the Lebanese government, but we must of course carefully coordinate everything at regular intervals with them and clarify what they think they need.

*During your talks with the Saudi foreign minister it seemed that Saudi Arabia does not see itself as a military power and that it will, as in the past, continue to help with Lebanon's reconstruction. This sounded as if the Saudis have already decided not to send troops. Did you get the same impression?*

It is true that there are discussions within the Saudi government about what contributions to make, whether they have to be in the form of troops or personnel, or whether they can be military facilities. But we do not want to, and indeed cannot, make this decision for the Saudis. We should, however, consider that both Saudi Arabia and Jordan have already contributed a great deal towards stabilizing the situation – Jordan, by making sure that even during the fighting Beirut airport was in a condition to allow aid flights, and Saudi Arabia, by announcing very generous reconstruction assistance. I think we should take due account of this.

*Prior to your visit the Saudi foreign minister met his Iranian colleague Mottaki. During your talks, did you get any information about whether there will be any kind of positive signal on 22 August, when Tehran is to issue its declaration regarding the nuclear dispute?*

Well, the problem is not the positive signals. After his talks with the Saudi foreign minister, Mr Mottaki himself repeated the signal that Iran wanted to return to the negotiating table, to discuss the proposal made by the Six, and, for the first time, hinted that Tehran was ready to talk about suspending enrichment. However, over the past six to eight weeks the strength of these signals has become somewhat doubtful. We need a position on our proposal which, as you know, was only put together after difficult negotiations.

*Your trips to the Middle East also aimed to get on board those partners or potential partners who have not yet been playing a constructive role in the peace process, in other words Syria. Now the speech by the Syrian President has scotched that aim. You made a very clear decision. Do you feel, now that a few days have passed, that that decision was correct?*

I explained my decision, which could only take that form, to my Syrian colleague, and I told him that still feel we have every reason to include Syria in a constructive role in the stabilization process. It is quite simple, after the signal sent by President Assad, there was no way I could just start talks and signal "business as usual". On the contrary, I think the speech goes in absolutely the wrong direction. What we need now is verbal disarmament, ways of stabilizing what remains a fragile ceasefire. What we surely don't need is a call for resistance against all those who are trying to maintain that ceasefire. From the reaction in Lebanon you can see that they are horrified at this speech.

*Nonetheless, you are returning home with maybe a slight feeling of personal defeat?*

I am not happy that I didn't succeed in what I, firstly, planned to do and, secondly, regard as right and important, that is to get Syria involved in this process. But this isn't possible at the moment, and for that reason I told my Syrian colleague that I am ready for dialogue but not at any price – the dialogue must be results-oriented. If that is what Damascus wants, we expect the Syrian government to send a corresponding signal.

*Interview conducted by Sabine Adler*

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<http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/diplo/en/Infoservice/Presse/interviews/2006/060818-dlf-nahost.html>