

The EU External Relations Commissioner [Benita Ferrero-Waldner](#) is planning to travel to the Middle East later this month, ahead of the upcoming Middle East peace conference in Annapolis, Maryland. She will try to encourage a consensus between the Israeli and Palestinian negotiating teams, which have so far failed to reach agreement on core issues. Benita Ferrero-Waldner's post is due to be merged with Javier Solana's post following the ratification of the new EU Constitution. Her visit follows that of US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who had announced a [\\$410 million](#) package to save the Palestinian Authority.

Quote: *"Ferrero's first stop will be Israel, where she will meet with Israeli President Shimon Peres, Israeli PM, Ehud Olmert, Israeli defense minister, Ehud Barak and vice Israeli PM. In the Palestinian territories, the EU high-ranking official is set to meet with Palestinian Prime Minister, Salam Fayyad, acting foreign minister, Riyad Almaliki and top Palestinian negotiator, Ahmad Qurai. A part of her visit will be a field tour in the West Bank refugee camp of Qalandia and an EU-built local school. In Cairo, meetings will involve the Egyptian President Husni Mubarak and foreign minister Ahmad Abu Elgheit, with an emphasis on ways to develop EU-Egyptian relations.*

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert [met](#) with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas today in their efforts to formulate a joint statement that will pave the way for the creation of a Palestinian state. It seems all sides are hardening their positions ahead of the upcoming summit, Abbas demanding all of Judea, Samaria, Gaza and East Jerusalem for a state, and Olmert demanding any statement abide by the principles of the Roadmap to Peace. Originally the US and EU had stated that both sides should move to [final status negotiations](#), seeing the first stages of the Roadmap could not be implemented. And as Israel and the Palestinians harden their stance ahead of the summit, so the EU and US increase their pressure on Olmert and Abbas to do a deal. Just as the peace deal in Northern Ireland required intense diplomatic pressure and bribery on the part of the UK government (£1 billion in aid), perhaps bribery may play a part in the formulation of a deal. If Israeli and Palestinian leaders find a sudden willingness to negotiate, you will know that the EU will have had something to do with that.

Source [MEMC](#) , [Haaretz](#)