
WORLD LEADERS LOOK TO BERLIN FOR MORE GUIDANCE

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4 January 2012 DW What does the international community expect of Germany during a time of crisis? Should Berlin take the helm and steer the continent or hold back? World leaders discuss this at the Munich Security Conference. Wolfgang Ischinger, chairman of the Munich Security Conference, chose the words to his opening speech carefully: "Non-military topics are more important than ever when it comes to our security." The eurozone crisis is forcing Germany to take the lead in Europe, but this is not going down well in all quarters. Some feel Berlin's approach to solving the crisis is impinging on their national sovereignty. It is a rather unusual and delicate topic to start off a security conference. Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski was among those invited. Back in December he had said that as a Polish citizen he was more concerned about Germany holding back than taking the lead. In Munich, he reiterated his country's willingness to support Berlin in solving the European crisis, which after all was in Germany's own interest. "Germany is the greatest beneficiary of Europe and it has to act accordingly," said Sikorski. He added that Germany needed partners to enforce the necessary measures. "The European Union is the body best suited for this task." World Bank chief critical But it's not just the Europeans who are increasingly looking to Germany for a way out of the crisis. The American head of the World Bank, Robert Zoellick, said in Munich that emerging countries are also banking on Germany. "2012 could either be the year when Germany takes the lead or starts flagging itself," said Zoellick. He was unsure which course Berlin would take, especially in view of public opinion in Germany. "I've got the feeling that domestic policy is dominating everything," said Zoellick. Zoellick stressed that Germany must help Italy and Spain with their debt problems, adding that struggling nations need incentives to enforce fiscal discipline and structural reform. The World Bank chief once again called for the introduction of eurobonds. Until now, Berlin has rejected any plans for such bonds, as Germany would then - through the European central bank - be liable for the debts of the other eurozone countries. Leadership - but where to? Zoellick's cautious criticism of Berlin was echoed by Frank-Walter Steinmeier of Germany's opposition Social Democrats. "Spending cuts alone are not a way out of the European crisis as they by themselves don't lead to growth," Steinmeier said at the conference. German Defense Minister Thomas de Maiziere however said that the call for German leadership was very often a call for money, rather than actual leadership. The question, he said, was whether indeed leadership would be accepted if it meant Germany pushing for more budgetary discipline. De Maiziere also pointed out that the discussion about a German leadership role in Europe and the wider world has for long been a taboo topic in the country itself. "For my taste there's actually too much talk of leadership in Europe," de Maiziere said in his opening speech in Munich. "Without Germany, we wouldn't have as much of a focus on budgetary stability in Europe as we have now," he said, defending Berlin's course. British historian Tomothy Garton Ash added that the current discussion was a good sign that Germany since reunification two decades ago had become a normal European state. "20 years ago, Germany was mostly focusing on European integration. Now, it is also acting more on its own behalf - just like France or Britain

do," Ash said. Author: Daniel Scheschkewitz, Munich /ai Editor: Richard Connor

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