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“More responsibility” in the world: the  
biggest challenges are not military ones

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# The Current Column

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## "More responsibility" in the world: the biggest challenges are not military ones

Bonn, 10 February 2014. The debate has begun. The German Foreign Minister, entering office for the second time, announced that there would be broad-based "internal reflection on German foreign policy's future prospects", while the nation's Minister of Defence called on the country to assume greater responsibility internationally, and the German Federal President said that the nation "should make a more substantial contribution, and it should make it earlier and more decisively" if it is to be a good partner in conflict prevention. For years, politicians and experts have complained that there has been too little debate, and indeed argument, in Germany about the fundamentals of its foreign policy. They have pointed to an unwillingness among the public and the media to engage in such dialogue or respond to efforts to do so. However, the ball is now rolling and it is evident that political leadership is making a difference. The long awaited debate has commenced and that is a good thing, as there is plenty to discuss.

Admittedly, when a Minister of Defence starts talking about assuming responsibility, many people see the next Bundeswehr mission on the horizon. However, the biggest challenges are not military ones. Assurances about military action being a last resort would gain more credibility if Germany and Europe backed up their claims about intending to assume responsibility primarily as civilian powers with more action. There are three tasks that the country should focus upon.

Firstly, Germany can and must consolidate and expand its capabilities when it comes to the use of civilian means in non-violent resolution of conflicts. The German Government laid a key foundation in this regard when it produced its Action Plan for Civilian Crisis Prevention ten years ago. Tools such as civil-peace-expert training have been professionalised, and peace-building has become a key area of development cooperation in many partner countries. However, the momentum of the first few years has slowed. As the economic crisis unfolded and coalition governments came and went, it was no longer possible to discern a clear political commitment to turn peace-building into a trademark of German peace policy. New initiatives are needed. Germany, seen in many of the world's regional conflicts as a rather unbiased actor with few vested interests, could use its reputation to offer its services as a competent and experienced mediator. This is an area in which Switzerland and Norway have been very successful internationally, but the two countries are unable to meet all of the demand for effective mediation, and they do not always have the most promising conditions to start with. Germany could also very successfully export services to assist unstable countries in

setting up a democratic police force and judiciary, with these services delivered by German police officers, judges and public prosecutors. A clear legal framework and corresponding funding would be required to develop these areas.

Secondly, Germany can and must play an active role in shaping the future global order. A more just and resource-efficient global order that upholds human rights will be key to long-term conflict prevention and to the creation of a safer world. Ideological and religious extremism can only be defeated in the minds of individuals. If individuals see their family, people group or country permanently doomed to being the losers in global competition, then no amount of military intervention will remove their sense of frustration. Gerd Müller, Germany's new Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, is right to call for globalisation to be shaped in such a way "that it serves people, not markets." The debate about establishing new sustainable development goals to replace the Millennium Development Goals when they expire in 2015 provides an opportunity to lay out a roadmap for global development.

Thirdly, Germany can and must provide a good example for others to follow. Only those who are prepared to set standards themselves and blaze a trail can take others with them. Germany has the potential to bring its European partners on board in pursuing policies that safeguard our global future. Europe still has the resources and status necessary for pioneering global standards. If we do not do it, then who will? We cannot expect China or other emerging powers, who are still a long way off achieving the level of prosperity that we enjoy, to do so. The energy transition is perhaps the most significant project that Germany has undertaken in the last ten years with regard to safeguarding the chances of a better life for people around the world. In this context, responsibility means not jeopardising the prospects of future generations out of fear of experiencing a small dip in our standard of living. Germany's role as a raw-material importer and arms exporter also needs to be discussed in this context.

Steinmeier, von der Leyen and Gauck are right in calling for us to have this discussion about Germany's responsibility at global level. Let us discuss this issue in light of our values, recognising that our lives are inextricably caught up in the global challenges that will characterise the 21st century.