

## World Knowledge Forum 2012

Wednesday, October 10, 2012 – Joschka Fischer: The Leadership I Expect

Joschka Fischer, Former German Minister of Foreign Affairs, presented a speech entitled The Leadership I Expect at the 13<sup>th</sup> World Knowledge Forum on October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2012. He explored the problems in the Eurozone and the future of the European Union, which he believes will eventually make a turnaround.

Mr. Fischer, who is also a former Vice-Chancellor of Germany, examined where Europe stands from a political standpoint, the reason for the present crisis, and the direction Europe should move in. He focused on the role that a lack of leadership has played in the past and the role it will play moving forward.

“The problem of Europe is not our economic or financial weakness – we’re not so weak, by the way. The problem of Europe is that we were hit in between; in the center of a very strong current in the sea,” Mr. Fischer explained. This current in the sea that he is referring to is the lack of political unification in the European Union.

Mr. Fischer reminded his audience of the political situation that led to the EU’s formation. He cited the conflicts between individual nation states in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, adding, “The first and second World Wars led to a self-destruction process.”

He credited two French statesmen and a German Chancellor from the 1950s with having the leadership to create the idea of the European Union. The Union’s purpose was to overcome hostilities and build common, peaceful institutions among the nation-states. “It was a political idea, and the economic and financial issues were used as tools for political purposes,” he stated.

The biggest strength of the EU, Mr. Fischer believes, is the political stability it provides. Bringing together the economies was meant to be an instrument for bringing together the European countries. However, he feels that “one of the shortcomings of today’s EU is that the European leaders are discussing mostly money.”

Another problem Mr. Fischer perceives with the state of European affairs today is that the leaders “don’t have the courage to address the issues to the public.” In this light, he believes there are two main questions the public and leadership need to answer.

The first of these questions is whether the unification process should continue, or whether the EU should dissolve into the individual nation-states. “We cannot move ahead the way we are now; we have to make the choice either to move forward or to move backwards,” Mr. Fischer stated.

This question has become especially important in the face of Greece’s potential collapse. “Countries that are going bankrupt will not disappear,” Mr. Fischer pointed out, though he feels that the EU should have addressed the problem in Greece much earlier. He feels that it would have been worth the cost to stabilize the country through a bailout rather than face the more risky and expensive option of waiting for failure.

Mr. Fischer attributed the failure in Greece to the lack of leadership in Europe as a whole, raising the question of who should fill the leadership void. Although many on the outside believe that Germany should lead, he asserted

that the German decision-makers and the German people feel differently. “They have burned their fingers and almost full skin twice in the 20<sup>th</sup> century,” he says in reference to the World Wars.

“The real core of the European project was always Franco-German,” Mr. Fischer stated, adding that “France and Germany have to agree about a future strategy, but we lack strategic leadership on both sides of the Rhine.” He expressed hope that this condition will change after upcoming elections.

The second question Mr. Fischer wants addressed is what role Europe wants to play in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He believes that to remain a world power, the continent must stay united. Moreover, he does not see the collapse of the EU as a realistic option. “The EU is not a generational project; it’s a real historical project, developed over 60 years successfully. I haven’t met even one politician who is ready to blow up the project,” he said.

At the end of his presentation, Mr. Fischer stated that the banking and fiscal unions will move forward, and that the Euro will not collapse. However, he still believes that a common government will ultimately emerge, and closed his speech on an optimistic tone.

“The Europeans will make it. A lot of noise will happen, and it won’t look nice, because the European car will always go zigzag. People from the outside may think we’re drunk, but every time we’re close to the abyss, the wheel will be turned around, and we’ll move in the direction that I just predicted.”