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Peacekeeping Mission in Croatia: The Bundestag Resolves to Send Bundeswehr Units
(December 6, 1995)

After the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords, the Bundestag approved, by a large majority, the deployment of 4,000 Bundeswehr soldiers in support of the international peacekeeping mission. Excerpts from the Bundestag debate on the deployment are reproduced below. During the debate, Chancellor Helmut Kohl, SPD party chairman Rudolf Scharping, Green Party spokesman Joschka Fischer, and others, took the floor to explain their positions on the resolution.

[. . .]

On December 6 [1995], the Bundestag debated the deployment of Bundeswehr units to Croatia. Since the federal government had approved the deployment on November 28, a majority of the Social Democrats had already signaled their consent prior to the debate. Many Green Party representatives also cast votes of support for the Bosnia operation, although in doing so they abandoned important principles expressed in earlier party congress resolutions and ignored the most recent party congress's negative position on the deployment. Recently, party faction spokesman Joschka Fischer, in particular, repeatedly stressed that insisting on pacifism at all costs was not appropriate in the current situation.

At the beginning of the debate, Chancellor Helmut Kohl made a policy statement in which he asked parliament for broad support in accepting the deployment of German soldiers for peacekeeping purposes. His statement is excerpted here: "Ladies and gentlemen, you can read the resolution of the federal government on the deployment of armed forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In making this decision, the federal government was fully aware of the great responsibility attached to it. The task of the Bundeswehr has changed fundamentally since the end of the East-West conflict. The expectations that the international community places on a reunified Germany are different from those that were placed on the old Federal Republic. [. . .]

We did not take this decision lightly. [. . .] We are well aware of the toll that this deployment could take on our soldiers. After four years of a wretched war, anyone who participates in the military safeguarding of the path to peace also risks life and limb. The war in the former Yugoslavia has brought a degree of suffering to the European continent that many of us no longer thought possible after the horrifying experiences of the Second World War. More than

250,000 dead, two million refugees, expellees, thousands of women raped, hundreds of thousands injured, destruction and misery on an unfathomable scale – we dare not forget all of this now that the present mission is helping to secure peace. [. . .] The signing of the Dayton Peace Accords created the prerequisite for finally giving the people of Bosnia a real chance at achieving peace. After four and a half years of suffering, the people of the former Yugoslavia can finally look forward to a new year filled with hope. [. . .] Our respect, thanks, and recognition go first and foremost to President Clinton and the American administration.

This successful outcome would not have been possible without the efforts of our American partners and friends. I emphasized this again to President Clinton in the name of our people during our joint visit with American troops in Baumholder last weekend. [. . .] This conflict has been going on right on our doorstep for more than four years. [. . .] Many citizens of our land have tried over the past few years to relieve the hardship of people in the war zone through personal aid. A lot has been done to ease the fate of more than 400,000 civil war refugees who have found refuge with us. [. . .] From the experiences of this century, we Germans know: the long-term outlook for peace on our continent cannot be good if there is peace in one part of Europe while a bloody war rages in another. This is why the United States is now willing, together with Britain, France, and other allies, to send soldiers to the former Yugoslavia to secure peace. We must also keep this in mind when we decide today about sending 4,000 German soldiers to support the NATO peacekeeping force. [. . .]

Our soldiers should know that the vast majority of our citizens stand behind them. Our soldiers should know that they are taking on this responsible and not undangerous task for an important and just cause, for peace. [. . .] The peacekeeping force certainly cannot achieve peace on its own. The decisive contribution must come from all the parties involved in the conflict. But the peacekeeping force can do its part to give the Dayton Accords a chance of being implemented. We Germans cannot step aside in this peace mission, in which the United States, the countries of Europe, Russia, and the countries of the Islamic world are participating under NATO leadership. In past decades, Germany has always been able to count on the solidarity of its allies. Today, in a changed political environment, we are being called upon [. . .] to prove our solidarity in the preservation of peace. Stepping aside now would mean refusing to allow the people of the former Yugoslavia a chance for peace. Including Russia in the peace process provides an opportunity for relations between Russia and NATO to take on a new quality, and we are pleased about that. This cooperation between Western countries and Russia also represents a momentous historical change. [. . .]

In addition to its military contribution within the framework of the multinational peacekeeping mission, the Federal Republic of Germany will participate in reconstruction and in the return of refugees to the best of its abilities. [. . .] But let me add – everything we want to accomplish is possible only if others participate as well, if we arrive at an equitable sharing of burdens among the Europeans and the other participants. [. . .] Ms. President, ladies and gentlemen, with the deployment of an international peacekeeping force we are essentially pursuing – together with our partners – four main goals:

First: We must separate the warring parties. Attempts must be made to effectively prevent military conflicts from flaring up again. It is important to find a quick solution to the military enforcement of the agreement made in Dayton between Serbia and Croatia for the future of Eastern Slavonia. [. . .]

Second: The resulting peace will be the foundation upon which human and minority rights will be respected again and will become part of the prevailing legal order there. Our particular concern is the return of the refugees. [. . .] We should not forget that respect for human and minority rights, especially in Kosovo, continues to be a central demand directed at Belgrade. A comprehensive, just peace in the former Yugoslavia is not possible unless there is a just and lasting solution in Kosovo.

Third: The presence of the international peacekeeping force also satisfies the prerequisites for additional humanitarian aid, which is urgently needed, and the start of reconstruction. Peace cannot be secured if the people have no food, housing, or economic future.

Fourth: The international peacekeeping force is to guarantee peace and stability not only in Bosnia, but also in the entire region. The danger that the Bosnian conflict, with its ethnic and religious roots, could spread to neighboring countries, can only be averted if this goal is achieved. Stability in the former Yugoslavia is inconceivable as long as a huge arsenal of weapons continues to exist there. Therefore, we – the Federal Republic of Germany – have advocated particularly actively for a comprehensive system of trust-building measures and armaments control in this region. [. . .] The implementation of the Dayton Accords must be a mutual obligation, since a continuation of the war would bring new destruction, new suffering, and new hardship. This, too, will be among the tasks of our Bundeswehr soldiers: to work together with our allies to give the people of the former Yugoslavia and all the hopeful [people] in Europe reason to have faith in a better future, faith in a tangible chance for the peace that we all want.”

The debate was opened by SPD faction chairman Rudolf Scharping, who emphasized his party's support for the troop deployment, but who also pointed to the great risks involved in the operation. He said that it certainly wasn't easy for the Social Democrats to make a decision of such great import, but he also noted that a request from the international community could not simply be ignored from the outset. It is by no means an insult to one's honor, Scharping said, to have difficulty reaching a decision when it means sending thousands of soldiers to a war zone where hundreds of thousands have already lost their lives. He underscored that this contribution serves peace and dismissed Bundeswehr inspector general Klaus Naumann's assertion that the deployment is tantamount to a "combat mission" as "careless at the very least."

CDU faction chairman Wolfgang Schäuble defended Naumann's statement by saying that the soldiers could easily wind up in a situation where they had to fight to secure peace. It is a dangerous mission, he said, in which "risks can quickly arise," even if we hope they won't.

Schäuble was speaking to Joschka Fischer when he said that it would be desirable in the future if members of parliament refrained from participating in events where soldiers were referred to as “murderers.” Fischer rebuffed the critique sharply and accused the CDU of inviting a former court judge of the Wehrmacht to serve as an expert at a hearing on deserters in the last world war. He referred to the Hitler generals [Wilhelm] Keitel and [Alfred] Jodl and the ex-dictator of Chile [Augusto] Pinochet, and said that there are and have been soldiers who could be referred to as murderers. This of course, he added, does not apply to soldiers in a democratic state under the rule of law.

Fischer criticized the Dayton Peace Accords as “bitter and dangerous” because “there’s a danger that the instigators of ethnic cleansing will assert themselves”; he also said that a multiethnic Bosnia is a thing of the past. “But the alternative is war. That’s the reason why we’ll vote our conscience as individual members of parliament – most of us will be doing that for the first time – and not follow a majority decision by our party. For us, that’s not something that can be taken for granted. We’ll have to approve this Dayton peace, including its military aspects, because it can’t be implemented any other way. [. . .]” Fischer said he was aware that the conflict over Bundeswehr participation threatened to divide his party, but he saw himself faced with the “accursed dilemma” that people in certain situations can only survive if the military is sent in.

Speaking on behalf of the PDS, Gregor Gysi, among others, justified his rejection of the deployment by stating that the inability of the community of states to find a peaceful end to the conflict in the former Yugoslavia does not authorize them to resort to a military solution. It unsettled him that suddenly no one was talking about Blue Helmets [i.e. peacekeeping forces] anymore but of combat units “with emphatically green helmets.” The issue here is not the ordinary soldiers, he said, but rather his lack of trust in the political and military leadership of the Bundeswehr, which, as he noted, only recently renamed barracks that had been named after Nazi generals. According to Gysi, it is also important that we “break free from the 2,000-year-old military spiral.” Wolfgang Schäuble, Gysi said, should be happy that so many young people in Germany are interested not in military things, “but rather the opposite.”

Foreign minister Klaus Kinkel said that the deployment of the Bundeswehr is morally justified in order to secure peace in a destroyed Bosnia and to help the sorely afflicted people. The objective is not to wage war but prevent it. He rejected statements from the ranks of the opposition that civilian reconstruction efforts were overshadowed by military matters: “The military safeguarding of the peace treaty is the prerequisite for giving reconstruction and democracy any chance at all.” German participation, he said, is meant to send a signal to Europe and the world that “Germany practices responsibility and does its share.” German defense minister Volker Rühle reminded everyone that the Bundeswehr deployment was taking place pursuant to chapter seven of the U.N. charter and aimed to “build peace.” In contrast to the Gulf War or national defense, he said that the soldiers were invited by all the parties in the war to facilitate peace. Finance minister Theo Waigel estimated the cost of the mission at

roughly 700 million DM. Of that, 400 million would come from the defense budget. A decision on further funding could not be made until the middle of next year, he said. Waigel criticized certain ranks within the opposition, accusing them of holding an “ethically and politically untenable position.”

A large majority finally approved the deployment of 4,000 Bundeswehr soldiers. Of the 656 members of parliament who were present, 543 voted in support of the government’s motion, 107 voted no – including some SPD members – and six abstained. Whereas the PDS cast a unanimous no vote, the Greens were divided: 22 voted yes, and the same number rejected the Bundeswehr deployment. Five [Green] members of parliament who originally seemed to support the measure abstained in the wake of the party congress resolution.. A conflict arose within the Greens in connection with the vote. Jürgen Trittin, a spokesman for the “pacifist” wing of the party, called the behavior of the so-called “Realos”¹ in the faction a provocation. The faction leadership and the rank and file, according to Trittin, had shown “no ability to come together” in the vote. (SZ, FAZ, NZZ, KRWE, mdw).

Source of original German text: “14.12.1995 (Donnerstag). Bosnien-Herzegowina. Bundesrepublik Deutschland. NATO” [“12. December 1995 (Thursday). Bosnia-Herzegovina. Federal Republic of Germany. NATO”], in *Archiv der Gegenwart: Deutschland 1949 bis 1999*. December 14, 1995, pp. 49.711-49.722.

Translation: Allison Brown

¹ The “Realos” (realists) represent the pragmatic wing of the Green Party, while the “Fundis” (fundamentalists) hold tight to fundamental party principles, including pacifism – trans.