

Part III

Opening NATO's Door

Chapter 10

Opening NATO's Door

Volker Rühle

Making the Case

On March 26, 1993 I was the first ministerial-level official to argue that NATO should open its door to aspiring candidates in Central and Eastern Europe.

In my Alastair Buchan Memorial Lecture at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) in London, I placed the issue of NATO's opening in the broader context of the changes that had unfolded since the end of the Cold War.¹ It was time to create a new architecture for Europe that transcended the old divides of Versailles, Yalta, and the Cold War.

For the first time in European history we had the opportunity to build cooperation across all of Europe on the basis of democracy and market economies. Institutions designed for half of Europe had to be prepared to open their doors to new democratic members. This was as true for the European Union as it was for NATO.

The deepening and the widening of the European Union had to proceed in tandem. Without opening to the East, EU member states would never be able to advance their own cooperation. "Without our neighbors in Central and Eastern Europe," I argued, "strategic unity in Europe would remain an illusion."

This applied also to NATO. "We must not exclude our neighbors in the East from Euro-Atlantic security structures," I insisted. "Eastern Europe must not become a conceptual no-man's-land...and the Atlantic Alliance must not become a 'closed shop'." Opening Western institutions was not only important, I argued, it was urgent.

At the time, in my lecture and in other writings, I argued that "the success of the reforms in Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe

is the greatest strategic challenge of the Euro-Atlantic community...if the West does not stabilize the East, then the East will destabilize the West.” I warned that if Central Europe were to be left in a strategic vacuum, a turbulent and insecure in-between Europe (*Zwischeneuropa*) would emerge, and “sooner or later Russia and the European Union, or even Russia and Germany would come into conflict regarding their respective influence” in the region.² Such a situation could be in the interest of no country, including Russia.

What we needed was the right balance between cooperation and integration. It was important to sustain the momentum for cooperation with Russia and translate that into practical steps so that Russia would be recognized as a strategic partner for NATO, and would itself feel to be such a partner, while simultaneously ensuring that the special nature of such a partnership did not hinder or suppress the process of integration of other partner countries into Western institutions.³

Managing the German Debate

I didn’t consult my Chancellor, Helmut Kohl, on the content of my speech. If I had, I could not have given the lecture.

As Chancellor of a coalition government, Helmut Kohl could not be as forward-leaning as I was. That was clear. But if governing is just about compromising, you don’t succeed. I was neither shy nor insecure on that point. Internally, I pressed Kohl quite hard on NATO’s opening. He was still reticent for various political and tactical reasons. He never threatened to fire me if I went public with my views, but he and my colleague Hans-Dietrich Genscher, Germany’s Foreign Minister and a member of our coalition partner, the Free Democratic Party (FDP), tried to slow me down. Genscher was against opening NATO to new members. Genscher never said we could not achieve such a goal, he simply didn’t want to do it.

I disagreed and decided to go public. I was concerned that Alliance discussions on the issue had become desultory. Some weeks earlier, ambassadors to the North Atlantic Council had discussed informally in off-the-record session the possibility of NATO membership for Central and East European countries. The debate was inconclusive. I was convinced that this was an inadequate response to the desire of these

countries to join the Alliance. There was a danger of drift. It was time to put the topic on the international agenda.

I deliberately chose the IISS because it is a special place to give an important speech, and because of my close friendship with Helmut Schmidt. I did not consult Schmidt beforehand, but I wanted my speech to have a historic background. I recalled Schmidt's own ground-breaking speech at the IISS in 1977, when he warned that the Soviet Union was deploying a new generation of mobile intermediate-range missiles with multiple warheads that could decouple European from U.S. security unless NATO matched the new Soviet threat. Schmidt's speech led to NATO's dual-track decision to deploy intermediate-range missiles and also to negotiate with the Soviet Union the removal of this entire class of weapons from Europe, a strategy that ultimately proved to be successful.

When I gave the speech, my views were in opposition to my own government's official position. But I had had a history of not asking Helmut Kohl before making important speeches.

In 1985 I gave a speech in the Bundestag on German-Polish relations and on the Warsaw Treaty, which had been signed by West German Chancellor Willy Brandt and Polish Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz in December 1970.

In the treaty, both parties accepted the existing border, the Oder-Neisse line, which the Allied powers imposed on Germany at the 1945 Potsdam Conference. The German Bundestag ratified the Warsaw Treaty in May 1972. Nevertheless, the Treaty's Article IV stated that it did not supersede earlier treaties such as the Potsdam Agreement, so the provisions of Warsaw Treaty could be changed by a final peace treaty between Germany and the wartime Allies, as provided for in the Potsdam Agreement. Some conservatives interpreted this to mean that the German-Polish border had not been ultimately settled. This was of great concern to the Poles.

In my 1985 speech I said clearly that if Germany would again be united, its eastern border would be the Oder-Neisse line. I considered the Warsaw Treaty as politically binding for a united Germany. Poland and Germany had common strategic interests. Poland wanted a democratic neighbor in the West. The only precondition was that the

border question had to be resolved. It was incumbent upon Germany to reassure the Poles on this point.

Kohl understood my rationale, but the speech made him angry because once again he had other political and tactical considerations in mind. For Kohl, my speech was another political headache. Franz Josef Strauß, the Bavarian leader of the Christian Social Union (CSU), the sister party of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) to which Helmut Kohl and I belonged, demanded that Kohl throw me out of the party. Kohl refused. But he was not happy.

Formative Experiences

My Polish experiences were formative when it came to shaping my views of opening NATO's door. In the 1980s I was Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Group of the CDU/CSU responsible for Foreign Policy, Defense and German-German relations. In the early part of that decade I was already in Poland meeting *Solidarnosc* people living in the underground, for instance Janusz Onyszkiewicz, at the time *Solidarnosc*'s press spokesman and later my close friend as Defense Minister. After the declaration of martial law in December 1981, Onyszkiewicz had been arrested. He was later released, but he was still banned, living in illegality. In 1984 I met him nonetheless. I'm sure many spies were surveilling us, but I knew that the Polish authorities couldn't do anything. In fact, I invited him to a reception at the German embassy in Warsaw with all the official Polish authorities. I didn't ask the German Ambassador. He would have said no. I just brought him. I wanted Janusz Onyszkiewicz to be my guest. The Poles were just stunned by this.

My intensive political contacts with Polish interlocutors during that time made me realize that the Polish opposition was more in favor of German unity than most in Germany and in my own party. Those fighting their own regime in Poland believed they had a vital interest in having a democratic, unified Germany as a neighbor. After unification in 1990 I felt politically and morally obliged to stand up for the unity of Europe, to ensure that those countries that had enabled us all to overcome the division of Europe and the division of Germany enjoyed the same sense of security that we did, and to help prepare the path for them to be integrated into Western structures.

My second main motivation for opening NATO's door emerged in the context of German unification. During that process, I was Secretary General of the CDU. As the unification unfolded, it became clear to me that as Germany and Europe emerged from the Cold War, it would be wrong and dangerous for the eastern border of NATO and the European Union to coincide with Germany's eastern border, because then the border between stability and instability would be identical with Germany's eastern border. It was incumbent upon us to extend the Western space of stability eastward.⁴

After I became Germany's Defense Minister in 1992, my contacts with Central and East European policymakers were renewed. It was very clear that with the breakdown of the division of Europe, the Poles, the Czechs, the Hungarians and the Baltic states wanted to be members of the European Union and of NATO.

My Polish friends approached me and they said: We want the same security as Germany. And we can only get that in NATO. I shared their opinion that they deserved the same security as Germany.

Full Steam Ahead

I never liked the expression NATO expansion. I prefer the term opening of NATO. At a very early stage, I decided to develop a concept for the opening of NATO, very much with the help of Admiral Ulrich Weisser, who led my policy planning staff. Without Weisser, I could not have done it.

Weisser and I alone produced the IISS speech; he wrote the final draft. We had not informed anyone of the content.

After the speech, the German generals with us on the flight back to Germany were both surprised and depressed. They said that this was a blow to NATO that we would feel for many years. The domestic reaction was also skeptical.

I didn't care about domestic criticism; my approach was strategic. The Central and East European countries did more for Germany's unification than anybody else. How can you have a European Union where some countries feel safe and others do not? I was undeterred and deter-

mined to press ahead. But I had to win over my government, the Americans, other NATO allies, and to thread the needle with the Russians.

In Germany, I had a good relationship with Chancellor Kohl. He never threatened to fire me. But I remember at least one instance—and I think there were more—when Kohl took me aside after a Cabinet meeting telling me that he and Yeltsin were in the sauna and Yeltsin had complained about me, arguing that he had to get his Defense Minister under control. And then Kohl told me to stay out of debates over NATO's opening. I didn't, of course. I knew that he was not going to fire me.

People in the Chancellery, for instance Kohl's National Security Adviser Joachim Bitterlich, said, "Don't listen to Rühle." They argued that I did not represent the German position and the Chancellor's view. They were very much against our approach. In some instances, the Chancellery did not inform me about its talks with U.S. interlocutors. But the Americans informed me about their talks with the Chancellery, which is very unusual.

In my own ministry, the German generals were also against NATO's opening. One general stated in an interview that Polish tanks were not good enough for NATO. I told him: "If you say this again, I will fire you. We will give the Polish our tanks for one Deutschmark," which we later did. It shows you: the military were not thinking in geostrategic terms. Many of them were totally against it.

Klaus Kinkel, my colleague as Germany's Foreign Minister, was not a strategic thinker. He was totally undecided on this issue. I really took the leading role, but made sure that the German Foreign Office was not totally pushed to the side. Wolfgang Ischinger, the director of Kinkel's policy planning staff and later the Political Director of the Foreign Office, was more open, and he and Admiral Weisser cooperated closely.

It was easier to open NATO without Genscher. Kinkel was not as strong. But Genscher was kind of a one-man *ancien régime*. He still had a lot of influence with Kinkel. We often had difficulties with the Foreign Office. Weisser approached me regularly asking for permission to go to the Foreign Office to talk things over with Ischinger to keep him informed. Weisser also always informed the Chancellery. At some point, we needed the whole government behind us.

I did not have many discussions with Social Democrats about NATO's opening. Karsten Voigt, the foreign policy spokesman for the SPD, was quite open to it. But I had enough challenges in my own government and in the U.S. Administration. The Social Democrats and the other parties could not help me with that.

Moving the Americans—and the Alliance

When I first talked to the Americans in 1993 about opening NATO's door, they were against it. Their position only changed after the mid-term elections in 1994. Bill Clinton and Strobe Talbott had both been Rhodes Scholars in Oxford, and they were both so-called "Russia-firsters." You can also see this when you look at the documents and the talks between Clinton and Yeltsin. That was also true for my American counterparts Les Aspin and Bill Perry.

After Strobe Talbott became Deputy Secretary of State, I had a conversation with him on opening NATO. I said, "Strobe, listen to me. The Poles want to be a member of the European Union. And they deserve the same security as Germany and France, don't you think so?" I added that "If we don't give them the same security, this will be the end of NATO. Why? Because they will then form something in between Russia and NATO, some security organization." I asked him, "do you think that this is in the interest of America?" I think he understood that if we didn't open NATO to them, there was a danger that NATO would break up. There was a beginning of a change of mind in 1994.

Meanwhile, I had to move things forward within the Alliance. The NATO bureaucracy did not want to expand. In one ludicrous memo they expressed concerns that a bigger NATO would mean there would not be enough parking spots at NATO Headquarters.

NATO Secretary General Manfred Wörner, in contrast, supported my efforts. In a speech on September 10, 1993, he said that NATO was not a closed shop, that the option of membership remained open, and that it was time to give a concrete perspective to those countries of Central Europe that sought membership and that the Alliance considered to be viable candidates for membership.

Wörner and I worked together to organize the NATO Defense Ministers' Meeting in Travemünde, Germany on October 20-21, 1993. This was my first big NATO conference as Defense Minister. I had been in office just for a year and a half.

While preparing for the conference, I learned from my people that the United States intended to float a proposal for something called a Partnership for Peace. We were concerned that it was a means to avoid NATO's opening. I sent Weisser to Washington on October 12 and 13, 1993 to find out where the U.S. Administration stood on the issue. Weisser returned believing that our position could be aligned with that of the Clinton Administration. He reported that the German and U.S. sides agreed that NATO had to undergo an internal adaptation that equipped it to deal with new missions, and that Western security structures had to be opened to new members. He added, however, that the U.S. interagency discussions were still not uniformly aligned. These differences were encapsulated in the idea of the Partnership for Peace.⁵

It was imperative for us to use the Travemünde meeting to build a consensus on NATO's opening. In remarks to the press before the event began, I made it clear that the Central and East Europeans had to be offered a clear membership perspective. The question was no longer "whether," but rather "when" and "how."⁶

As expected, discussions at the meeting centered on the nature of the Partnership for Peace (PfP), which U.S. Defense Secretary Les Aspin proposed and which had been developed by U.S. General John Shalikashvili, who intended PfP to be an alternative to NATO membership. I disagreed.

The Americans knew I was their friend even when I was fighting with them. I was not and am not anti-American. I was and remain very pro-American and always approach things with a transatlantic perspective. I visited the United States for the first time in 1963 and since entering the Bundestag in 1976 I had cultivated close relations with many American colleagues in the Congress, in the government, and in the think tank world. The Americans knew me and took my position very seriously. They listened to my argument that we would destroy NATO if we did not open it.

Manfred Wörner played an important role in Travemünde. He very much agreed with me. He had cancer, but he had lots of fighting spirit to support me. Without him, I would not have been able to turn around the Travemünde meeting. In his role as NATO's Secretary General, he could not confront the Americans as sharply as I could. But he played his role consummately as Secretary General by summarizing that there appeared to be consensus on two points. First, there was support for NATO enlargement, and that a process to this effect should be initiated at the January 1994 Brussels Summit. Second, there was support for the U.S. concept of a "Partnership for Peace" as a useful step in this process, but not as an alternative.⁷

In the end, Wörner and I crafted the language reporting on the conclusions of the meeting so that PFP could also be understood as offering a path to eventual NATO membership. The nuanced language was underestimated at the time. It was finalized despite U.S. concerns. My good friend Hans Haekkerup, the Danish Defense Minister, as well as the Dutch and the Canadians, were instrumental in securing the final language that opened NATO's door.

Hans Haekkerup was my closest ally in Europe. He was totally in favor of opening NATO's door. He was from a small country, but he was a strategic thinker. Together, we conceived the idea to establish a joint Danish-Polish-German corps, consisting of three divisions, in Szczecin. We started this process in 1994, three years before the 1997 Madrid Summit, where the first invitations were extended. This initiative could not have been done by Germany and Poland alone. Denmark played a very big role. In the old NATO, before 1990, there was a joint Danish-German command in Rendsburg. So, Hans suggested that we had to do something new to foster the process of opening NATO up. I suggested Szczecin. It has developed very well. In the meantime U.S. forces are also now there.

The effort to change U.S. and Allied opinion took time. If one looks back, it is astonishing: people did not understand the kind of problems that we would have had if we had not opened up NATO. I think that without NATO's opening, the European Union would not have survived as an institution.

The Clinton Administration did not fully turn in our direction until after the U.S. mid-term elections in November 1994. Even in Septem-

ber 1994, at a meeting of NATO Defense Ministers in Seville, Spain, my U.S. counterpart Bill Perry warned me about moving too fast. Perry is a friend of mine and I hold him in high esteem. At the time he told me that President Clinton did not like what I was doing. His advice was “Don’t push too much. You will run into big problems.”

Richard Holbrooke played an important role in this process. In 1993, he came to Germany as the U.S. Ambassador. Weisser and I managed to convince him that NATO’s opening was a good thing. When he went back to Washington in 1994, he changed the attitude of the Clinton Administration.

The RAND Story

I had the political strategy in mind to open NATO. But I needed help to implement it. That’s why I hired RAND. I needed them to put some flesh on my ideas and to outline the next steps. There were so many things to do.

Weisser and I had long been familiar with RAND. They were open, and they were in favor of our approach. RAND helped us to develop a step-by-step effort. Every three to six months RAND analyst Ronald Asmus would come over to report on what they had been working on. We then decided on the next studies. Asmus and I knew each other very well. Weisser was the go-between.

Essentially I paid RAND to help me do something that was against the foreign policy position of the United States. RAND was very courageous to work with me. U.S. government representatives warned them against it. But I was very unconventional.

No German think tank supported me. They were all against it. The *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik* (SWP) would have been the only think tank in Germany that could have really helped me to develop the steps toward NATO membership for the Central and East European countries. I asked them. Michael Stürmer, the head of SWP, was totally against it.

There are multiple ironies to the RAND story. At one point I shared the RAND studies with the Clinton Administration and with my Polish colleagues. I told them the studies were free. I had already paid for

them. I said, "If it will influence you, that's enough for me." The studies were indeed influential. In 1997, in fact, Asmus even joined the Clinton Administration to implement the strategy.

Bosnia and German Responsibility

Between 1994 and 1997 we continued to work through the details of opening NATO's door. The conflict in Bosnia weighed heavily on our efforts. Without an end to the Bosnia crisis it seemed unlikely that there would be a consensus behind opening NATO to new members. Here again Richard Holbrooke played a major role by securing the Dayton Peace Accords.

When it came to implementing the Dayton agreement, Germany's role as an Alliance member was scrutinized. Through the Cold War Germany security and defense policy was focused on challenges in central Europe. There was little domestic support for German participation in foreign military missions. But in the post-Cold War period it was clear that Germany would be called on to join such efforts.

From the outset of my tenure as Defense Minister I argued that Germany had to take on the same responsibilities as its Alliance partners with regard to the use of military power.⁸In the summer of 1992 one of my first calls as German Defense Minister was to U.S. Defense Secretary Richard Cheney. He was clear that Washington expected greater German contributions to foreign military missions. I decided I would not come back to Washington until I had changed the German position. A major theme in my March 1993 IISS speech was Germany's responsibility to be a more proactive member and leader of the international community.

It was unbelievable to me that Germany did not contribute to U.N. military operations. One of my first acts as German Defense Minister, in May 1992, was to send German non-combat troops to participate in the U.N. mission in Kampuchea. Later in 1992 we send an navy air patrol as part of a NATO mission in the Adriatic. In 1993, we sent German non-combat forces to participate in the blue-helmet U.N. mission in Somalia. The deployments were controversial at home. Only in July 1994 did the Federal Constitutional Court rule that Germany's 1949 Constitution did not prohibit participation in multilateral peacekeep-

ing or combat operations, and that German troops were permitted to join military missions abroad if the parliament approved.

Nonetheless, German participation in implementing the Bosnian peace posed a real challenge. Helmut Kohl was quite reluctant to deploy German forces for historical reasons. He referred to the role of the Wehrmacht and the Croatian Ustaše during World War II. I thought that our participation in the mission would be worth it if we could save many lives. I was determined that something like Srebrenica should never happen again. I was encouraged by the attitude of the Americans, who expected a united Germany to be part of these new roles of NATO. Manfred Wörner was also supportive. He believed that either we “go out of area” or “we go out of mission.” Others didn’t. It was quite a fight in Germany. Our coalition partner, the FDP, was against the deployment of German forces to Bosnia. Some Social Democrats, such as Karsten Voigt and Norbert Gansel, supported me. The Greens were totally opposed (later on, they agreed with my approach when we participated in the mission in Kosovo in 1999). In the end we managed to get a majority, and we joined the Bosnian implementation force.

Holbrooke gave us a call one morning to say that while watching television he had seen the Iron Cross on the surface of a Tornado jet in the sky over Sarajevo. He emphasized that this was a signal that Germany was a full member of the new missions of NATO.

If we were to succeed in adapting NATO to new missions and new members, Germany had to show that it was a reliable ally. Bosnia was a watershed for these efforts. Shortly after the end of the war, I met with Croatian President Franjo Tudjman. He believed that Europe ended right after the town of Banja Luka. For him, Bosnia was Turkish and a part of the former Ottoman-occupied territory, whereas my intention was not just to fulfill Germany’s role in NATO but also to work for the integration of what I call secular European Muslims. I am still convinced that if we had not intervened, al-Qaeda’s headquarters would not be in Afghanistan, but in Sarajevo. There was already money coming in from Saudi Arabia. We had to show that we were willing to fight for the human rights of Muslims in Europe. That was our mission: to play a full role in NATO’s new missions. And the other part of our mission was to fight for the rights of European Muslims, also later in Kosovo.

Deciding the “Who”

With the Bosnian peace being implemented and Alliance efforts at adaptation underway, and following the U.S. and Russian elections in 1996, the stage was set for the debate on who would be the first countries to walk through NATO's door. That decision was to be taken at the 1997 Madrid NATO Summit.

From the beginning I agreed with the American approach, which Strobe Talbott summarized as “small is beautiful.” If we brought in too many countries in the first round, it would appear as if this would be the end, and others would not be able to join later. But we envisaged NATO's opening as a process, not an event. If we wanted to bring in the Baltic states and others in later, it was just the right thing to bring three in first.

I was the first German political leader to name publicly the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland as Germany's preferred candidates to walk through NATO's door.⁹ As usual, I was ahead of my government—and the Alliance.

Kinkel again was undecided. The French, the Italians, the British, who had initially been against NATO's opening, were unclear about their preferences. The French position was rather ironic. When they first saw that they could no longer stop NATO's opening, they argued that it should proceed along the lines of the French version of NATO membership, i.e. without military integration. I told the Poles this, to which they replied, “They are fools.”

Initially, the French rejected NATO's expansion. The French then reversed course and favored bringing in five countries in the first round, including Romania. Chirac's argument was that they had much better tanks than the Poles. That was a very superficial view. My response was: I am not interested in the quality of their tanks. I am interested in their mindset.

Kohl was very slow to change his mind on opening NATO. He argued that it was very important to influence Yeltsin. The idea was not just to open NATO, but to develop a strategic relationship with Russia. While he had voiced support for enlargement earlier, he only decided on three new members a few months before Madrid. He was still angry

with me for pushing too hard. He didn't invite me to join the Summit. I didn't care. I was just happy. NATO was about to open its doors.

Shortly before Madrid, a German-French meeting was held between Kohl and Chirac. Chirac asked our delegation whether we were in favor of three, four or five new member states. Kinkel first said we are for three, four and five. That was typical for him. Then I said we are for three. Kohl did not say anything. But Kohl supported the American position.

A related challenge was what to tell aspirant countries who would not be among those asked to join NATO in Madrid. By 1995 it was apparent that we would not take in a large group of aspiring members. I visited the Baltic states August 21-23, 1995 to break the news.¹⁰ Estonian Prime Minister Lennart Meri attacked me in private when I told him we would likely start with three new NATO members. He was concerned that the process would end with three. He said: This is another Munich 1938.

I said you don't talk to us like this. This is not another Munich, this is Brussels. I am the one who started the process to open NATO at all. And now you criticize me because we don't bring in the Baltic states in the first phase. I was very outspoken. Later on, he understood that this was the right process: small is beautiful. His views had historic roots. Back in 1941, Meri's family was deported to Siberia. In the 1990s, he feared that Estonia and the Baltic states might be left out again. That was never my intention. But I understood his anxiety.

Managing Relations with Russia

As the process of integration proceeded, it was important to establish new patterns of cooperation with Russia. Only a few short weeks after my IISS speech, I conducted talks with the Russian leadership in Moscow on April 13-17, 1993. As I reported to the Chancellor upon my return, I came away with a number of observations. Russian Foreign Minister Andrey Kozyrev made it clear that Russia was guided by the geopolitical and geostrategic national interests of a normal country, and that a threat from the West no longer played any role in such considerations. My counterpart, Defense Minister Pavel Gratchev, added that Russia now considered the real threats to emanate primarily from

the south. Russian leaders emphasized that they sought a closer bilateral relationship with Germany, also in military-security issues; during my visit we signed a agreement on military cooperation. It struck me that NATO-Russia cooperation was opening a perspective for Central and Eastern European countries to draw closer to NATO and EU structures, and simultaneously for a new more intensive partnership between Russia and NATO to develop.

I continued to have regular meetings with the Russians, both in Germany and in Russia. In 1994, I went to St. Petersburg. I met Mayor Anatoli Sobchak and spent two days there. His deputy sat to his left: it was Vladimir Putin.

I met very often with Boris Nemtsov, Yevgeny Primakov, and Dmitry Rogosin, a member of the Duma who later became Russia's Ambassador to NATO. I met with Vyacheslav Trubnikov, who ran Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service, and Anatoly Chubais, who was Deputy Prime Minister and then chief of the Russian Presidential Administration. I also had many contacts with the community of strategic thinkers in Moscow. One of my most important contacts was Sergey Karaganov, who is still there and who had already been there during Soviet times. Another important contact was Deputy Defense Minister Kokoshin.

In our conversations, my Russian interlocutors did not try to change my strategic position. But we did try to work out things and to develop a strategic relationship. I explained my position that NATO was opening, not expanding. I told them that it was my conviction that Russia also deserved the same security and that one day we also might be open for Russia.¹¹

The relationship between NATO and Russia had always been difficult. The Allies only met as a group with the Russians after we had found a 100 per cent consensus in NATO. We missed some opportunities. In some instances, it would have been possible to discuss some issues with the Russians beforehand, for instance topics relating to the Middle East. I was also ready to have some Russian thinkers relegated to NATO's international staff. It goes without saying that you have to discuss crucial things only among the NATO member states. But there were many other issues which we could have invited the Russians to discuss, to give them the feeling and the reality that they could join the debate when it was still open.

My discussions with the Russians were not always pleasant. We had particularly difficult interactions related to the war in Chechnya. On New Year's Eve in 1995, the Russian army sent in 500 young, recently-drafted and half-drunk soldiers into Grozny. Most of them were killed. What I learned later on and what really angered me was that their only training with hand grenades had been throwing snowballs in St. Petersburg. I promptly disinvited Grachev from the Munich Security Conference. Kohl said: What are you doing? Yeltsin complained as well.

Nonetheless, I tried to develop a strategic relationship with Russia. One example was my proposal, which I developed in 1997 and 1998, to develop a military transport plane as a joint venture between Airbus and the Russian aircraft company Antonov. We talked to the Ukrainians about it. Their President was very much in favor, and the Russians also. Even the French President sent me a letter saying that France agreed that this could be studied. Politically and strategically, it would have been a clear signal that we were engaged in common projects, and that we lived in a new world, not just with treaties and words, but in a very practical way. We would have been able to show that it was not the old NATO expanding, but a new NATO opening together with a new relationship towards Russia. Unfortunately, the Schröder government did not follow up on this initiative. They gave in to the interests of Airbus and to West European industry.

I was strongly in favor of modernizing Russia. In the 1990s I did not fear a Russian backlash. Yeltsin was trying to reform Russia. It was chaos. Putin tried to bring back order and hierarchy. Unfortunately, we did not find the appropriate response to Putin's pleas for a common zone of trade and economic interdependence.

Notes

1. An edited version of the speech may be found at Volker Rühle, "Shaping Euro-Atlantic Policies: A Grand Strategy for a New Era," *Survival*, 35:2, pp. 129-137, DOI: 10.1080/00396339308442689.
2. Volker Rühle, *Deutschlands Verantwortung: Perspektiven für das neue Europa* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1994), pp. 21, 59.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 120.
4. For further exploration, see Ulrich Weisser, *Sicherheit für ganz Europa: Die Atlantische Allianz in der Bewährung* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1999), pp. 23-59.
5. Weisser, *op. cit.*, pp. 45-47.
6. *Ibid.*, p 49.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
8. Volker Rühle, "Sinn und Auftrag der Bundeswehr im vereinten Deutschland," speech of April 2, 1992, *Bulletin*, No 37, April 7, 1992, p. 346.
9. See "Bewertung der künftigen Rolle Moskaus," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, May 12, 1995.
10. See "Rühle fordert von Lettland und Litauen Geduld bei der Annäherung an EU und NATO," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, August 23, 1995; "Letten wollen die Zusicherung der NATO: Rühle brennt Hoffnungen auf einen schnellen Beitritt," *Handelsblatt*, August 23, 1995; Kristina Spohr Readman, *Germany and the Baltic Problem After the Cold War: The Development of a New Ostpolitik 1989-2000* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 182-184.
11. In 2010 I published a piece in *Der Spiegel* with Admiral Weisser, Frank Elbe and General Naumann arguing in favor of Russian membership in NATO. We explained that it was not our intention to expand the old NATO. Our article was much welcomed by President Medvedev and also by his advisers and the think tank people in Moscow. See Volker Rühle, Klaus Naumann, Frank Elbe and Ulrich Weisser, "Open Letter: It's Time to Invite Russia to Join NATO," *Der Spiegel*, March 8, 2010, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/open-letter-it-s-time-to-invite-russia-to-join-nato-a-682287.html>.

