

Approval for Expansion to the East (October 8, 1993)

Abstract

Defense minister Volker Rühe was one of the first German politicians to publicly approve the eastward expansion of the Western alliance systems, the European Union and NATO. In his view, they complemented each other and needed to be advanced in parallel to guarantee stability throughout all of Europe. Russia's security needs, however, also needed to be taken into consideration, and Europe and the United States needed to work in concert.

Source

Speech by German Defense Minister Volker Rühe on October 8, 1993, at Charles University in Prague (excerpts)

[...]

The European institution of unity – the European Community – is the greatest historical achievement of the postwar era. It must be maintained and developed, intensified and expanded. We must prevent it from becoming frayed or fossilized in what it has already achieved. That is a major creative task of the future – a task not only for present-day members. We do not want an anonymous central state that regulates all affairs from the North Cape to Sicily and from Gibraltar to Ostrava. We do not want a realm of shadows in which nations have lost their identity. Our future lies not in fearful flight into a new collective, but rather in the self-assured will of free nations to join together in all areas of politics. A [common] currency, diplomacy, security and the means to achieve it – these are the elements of the strong community that Europe needs. To accomplish this we need an equitable European burden sharing. Even Southern Europe is wealthy when compared with Central and Eastern Europe. The North-South transfer [of aid funds] must be at least partially redirected into a West-East transfer. To complete the internal unification of Germany we have a comprehensive program, the Solidarity Pact. We also need a pan-European Solidarity Pact. This includes opening up Western markets. Our American friends put it succinctly: “Trade is better than aid.”

But Europe is more than simply an economic undertaking. Europeans must learn to take their common foreign and security policy concerns into their own hands. We also need to think in global contexts to become a more effective and respected player. Europe cannot return to the power games and rivalries of the nineteenth century. We must create a tight and capable community. Only then will Europeans be able to protect their interests and make a decisive contribution to solving global challenges. The Maastricht treaty for a European Union prescribed a clear goal for foreign and security policy as well. It is inherent to the logic of this agreement, but first and foremost in the interest of all participants, to create a community of all Europeans. The intensification and expansion of European integration are inextricably linked. This applies to economic and social issues, and it also applies in equal measure to security policies. The continent must be brought together to form a political, economic, and strategic unit. This is the real task facing Europe now that it has overcome division. It is in no one's interest to see an unstable Middle Zone emerge.^[1] Despite the individual countries' differing points of departure, there is a common European security interest: We must understand stability as a pan-European task, so that the transition takes place in an orderly fashion and offers security to all peoples.

Therefore, I have been emphatically advocating the eastward expansion of the Western stability zone for months now. Germany does not wish to remain the eastern border state of the sphere of affluence. In the

long run, Western Europe will not do well if the East does badly. Your country, but also Poland, Hungary, and the Slovak Republic are clearly oriented toward the West. I am happy to see that the EC association agreement will be ratified this year. This agreement maps out your admission into the European Union (EU) and the Western European Union (WEU). The Community is based on equal security for all. I cannot imagine that some members of this expanded Community will enjoy the protection of NATO while other members will have to forgo it.

Russia is a particularly important factor for lasting stability in Europe. We can only achieve security with – and not against – Russia. We must also take into consideration the extremely difficult situation of reform forces in the intra-Russian debate. But I know from my talks in Moscow that Russia no longer sees the West as a threat. It is in favor of restructuring Europe's political landscape, as long as it is treated as an active and respected partner whose problems are taken seriously. The Russia of tomorrow is neither the czardom nor the Soviet Union. Whether or not Russia will be a stable, democratic partner is also up to us. Russia doesn't want to be excluded from the processes taking place in Europe, and it mustn't be either. It is seeking a new strategic partnership with NATO and a political-economic partnership with the EC. This is why I have said, always and everywhere, that close cooperation with Russia has a special role in the processes taking place in Europe. This cooperation is an essential precondition for the further development of Atlantic-European security structures.

With a view toward our central European neighbors and toward Russia, our policies will be shaped by two key concepts: integration and cooperation. I see the two as inextricable components of a comprehensive political strategy for achieving the overarching goal we all share: pan-European stability. We need both: on the one hand, the EC and NATO must promote cooperation with Russia and expand it to new areas. We also need a corresponding approach for other countries in the East; here, Ukraine plays a special role. On the other hand, the federal government is in favor of paving the way, step by step, for the countries of East-Central Europe to join the European-Atlantic institutions. These include, in addition to the European Community and the Council of Europe, the WEU and NATO as well. We are expecting a definitive signal from the NATO summit in January 1994, one similar to the signal given at the Copenhagen EC summit on EU membership. The German foreign minister expressed this position a few days ago before the United Nations general assembly.

These questions are now being tackled in capital cities on both sides of the Atlantic. At the moment, there are still differing opinions. There are also concerns that expanding NATO could water down the strength of mutual assistance. After all, NATO is the only truly functional alliance. Therefore, it is imperative that it be maintained as an anchor of stability for Europe. For this reason, one important consideration is whether a candidate for admission should first be required to achieve complete internal stability and resolve all existing problems with its neighbors, or whether membership at an early stage could, in fact, advance stability and eliminate lingering conflicts with neighbors.

I presume that Western companies are more willing to invest if external security is assured. That would also give Eastern markets considerable momentum. Postwar West Germany is a striking example of this.

A consensus must be found – among Europeans and between Europe and the United States. It is also in the interest of the United States to have as its partner a Europe that is stable, predictable, and capable of acting, in order to meet common global challenges. There is a contractual link between the WEU and NATO. When new partners join the European Community and the Western European Union, the question of NATO admission is posed automatically. But North America cannot be confronted with European decisions after the fact. The United States cannot be presented with a *fait accompli* whose consequences it will have to bear without having participated in the processes that preceded it. The United States must participate in the processes underway in Europe from the very beginning, because America has become part of the culture of European security.

[...]

NOTES

[1] “Middle Zone”: The German word *Zwischeneuropa* refers to the zone between Western Europe and Russia, from Estonia to Bulgaria – trans.

Source: “Rede des deutschen Verteidigungsministers Volker Rühe, am 8. Oktober 1993 an der Karls-Universität in Prag (Auszug)”. Press Materials (Federal Minister of Defense, Press Staff, Bonn), No. XXX/16, October 8, 1993; reprinted in *Europa-Archiv*, Series 3/1994), pp. D 101–04.

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