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The Kosovo War and the Greens (May 13, 1999)

Only six months after the start of the red-green coalition, the governing parties faced a litmus test. For the first time since the Second World War, the Federal Republic declared its readiness to deploy troops and military airplanes in support of a military intervention – in this case, the NATO operation in Kosovo. The decision met with resistance, especially within the Green Party. Foreign minister Joschka Fischer delivered the following speech at a special Green Party congress that had convened specifically to discuss this issue. Fischer appealed to fellow party members to support the military operations in Kosovo.

Speech by the Foreign Minister on the NATO Deployment in Kosovo

Dear friends, dear opponents, dearest opponents, we have already been part of the government coalition for half a year, half a year [shouting: “warmonger!”] – yes, that’s just what I’ve been waiting for – a warmonger is speaking here and soon you’ll be recommending Mr. Milosevic for the Nobel Peace Prize. When a fellow party member stood here and said that the party leadership is discussing its internal discord, well I don’t know how you all feel when you see the photographs. I never would have dreamt that we’d be having a Green Party congress after only six months. [. . .]

I thought that we wanted to have a discussion here, and that the friends of peace are interested first and foremost in peace. And if you’re so sure of yourselves, then you should at least listen to the arguments and then present your counterarguments. This matter will not be resolved with chants and paint bombs, not among ourselves and not in a larger context. And we are experiencing that here at this party congress; and inasmuch it is not internal discord but rather external discord. I also never would have dreamt that we Greens would ever need to hold a party congress under police protection. But why do we need to have our discussion under police protection? Not because we want to have a discussion, but rather because some people here obviously don’t want to have a discussion, as we just experienced. But that is precisely the point! I know, as foreign minister, I have to hold myself back; for well-considered reasons I cannot comment on certain things. It’s hard for me to hold back in light of things that I’ve heard recently. Yes, “give democracy a chance”; I support that wholeheartedly. But let me tell you: I visited Milosevic; I spoke with him for two and a half hours; I pleaded with him to refrain from using force in Kosovo. Now there is war, yes. And I never would have dreamt that the red-green

government would have a part in this war. But this war did not just start fifty-one days ago; it has been going on since 1992, dear friends, since 1992! And let me tell you, in the meantime, it has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands, and that is the point where Alliance 90/The Greens is no longer a protest party. We decided to be part of the federal government, in a situation where it was clear that the absolute culmination of the Yugoslavian war of succession could take place. I can still remember. [. . .] – No, I won't shut up! I won't do you that favor! – [. . .] I can still remember: it was right after the Bundestag elections, and [Gerhard] Schröder and I flew to Washington. We were still in the opposition, and it was already clear that we would inherit a legacy that under certain circumstances could lead to a bloody confrontation, to a war. And at this point I can only say one thing: even back then, when we decided to form the coalition, it was clear to us that we were taking office in a difficult situation.

I never would have dreamt that the first six months [of our coalition] would witness not only Agenda 2000¹ and the [European] Commission crisis but also the Rambouillet issue² and finally the failure of Rambouillet and the war over there. I can only reiterate what I'm not prepared to accept: the prerequisite for peace is that people are not murdered, that people are not expelled, that women are not raped. That is the prerequisite for peace! And I'd be the last to say that I've made no mistakes. Especially recently when reference has been made to status reports. Yes, it was a mistake, and I have to accept that. In the first six months I wasn't able to do everything, especially under all the pressure, but I carry the responsibility for that and am therefore rightly criticized. Other mistakes were also made. But on the other hand I want to say to this you, and here I would like also to tell the party about my own personal situation. The crucial point, however, is that we really did try everything to prevent this confrontation. And let me say, God knows I'm not a delicate flower, I can take a lot and I dish it out, God knows, but it really hurt to be personally accused of dragging the Federal Republic of Germany into war. I can only say one thing: The G8 has agreed on a common foundation, a declaration of principles based entirely on Rambouillet. And I can only assure you that I did everything in my power to prevent this confrontation. And if anyone thinks he'd be able to take a blameless position on this issue, then we need to look at this position step by step. I was accused of moral overkill and of trying to eradicate Germany's history and things like that. Let me say: for me, two central points in my own biography played a crucial role, and I cannot ignore my own personal history. And I have to ask myself, in this matter, who can?! In Solingen, when there was this terrible, murderous attack on a foreign family, a Turkish family, came the racist attacks, neo-Nazism, skinheads. Of course, for me, too, this always brings up our history and that plays a role. And I have to ask myself, if all

¹ Agenda 2000 was an action program for the European Union. Its objectives were to strengthen common policies and to give the European Union a new financial framework for the period 2000-06 with a view to Eastern expansion – trans.

² The Rambouillet Agreement was an interim peace agreement between the former Yugoslavia and a delegation representing the ethnic-Albanian majority population of Kosovo. The agreement was brokered by U.S., E.U., and Russian negotiators. They proposed a compromise that would have given Kosovo more autonomy while upholding Yugoslavia's territorial integrity. Yugoslavia's refusal to sign it and the escalation of Serb repression in Kosovo led to NATO air attacks on Yugoslavian and Serbian troops in Kosovo – trans.

of us have always used this argument in domestic matters, then why aren't we using it now that expulsions and ethnic warfare have returned to Europe and bloody consequences have already been registered. Is that a moral arms race? Is that overkill? Auschwitz is beyond comparison. But I believe in two principles: never again war and never again Auschwitz. Never again genocide and never again fascism. Both belong together for me, dear friends, and that is why I joined the Green Party. I have to wonder why you're refusing to participate in this discussion. Why are you rejecting this discussion by blowing whistles if you identify yourselves as the Left or even the radical Left? You may very well think that everything this federal government and NATO have done is totally wrong. But I would be interested in hearing how, from a left-wing perspective, we can refer to everything that has gone on in Yugoslavia since 1992, including ethnic warfare and nationalistic policies; what do you call this from a left-wing perspective, from your point of view? Could it be that we have become accustomed to old conceptions of the enemy and that Mr. Milosevic doesn't fit into these conceptions very well? Let me tell you that with the end of the Cold War there has been a return to ethnic warfare and to nationalistic policies that Europe must not accept.

[. . .]

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