

Kohl ally wants German troops to help in Bosnia

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BONN, April 15 (Reuter) - An ally of Chancellor Helmut Kohl broke a long-standing taboo on Friday by calling for German troops to join Bosnia peace missions despite the memories of Nazi cruelty in former Yugoslavia.

Wolfgang Schaeuble, the canny parliamentary leader of Kohl's Christian Democratic Union (CDU), upped the ante in a debate about Bonn's future military role by saying German troops should go there if all sides agreed.

Kohl, like Schaeuble speaking in a newspaper interview, said he was "extremely cautious" about sending any kind of German help because war memories there were still so bitter.

"Our basic position is that Germany must make a contribution, including a military one, to peace in former Yugoslavia," Schaeuble told the Cologne daily Express.

"If peace is concluded, the participation of German soldiers in securing and reinforcing this peace should not be ruled out. But only on one condition - all sides must agree."

Interviewed by Munich's Sueddeutsche Zeitung, Kohl showed more concern about Germany's dark past in Yugoslavia than Schaeuble, his most powerful ally in Bonn.

"Memories of the Second World War are still especially fresh in that part of Europe," he said. "One has to wonder whether German help of any kind would really be welcome."

Nazi Germany supported a brutal fascist puppet state in Croatia during the war and fought against partisans commanded by the legendary Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito.

Schaeuble's proposal, which has been debated within the CDU as a bold initiative to take the lead in this year's election campaign, seemed aimed at putting pressure on the opposition Social Democrats (SPD) to back more military missions abroad.

The left-leaning SPD has slowly come around to supporting German participation in United Nations peace-keeping missions and joined the CDU on Thursday in passing a resolution in parliament backing NATO air strikes against Bosnian Serbs.

But its moderate leader Rudolf Scharping has drawn the line at offensive missions like the Gulf War and, like all other leading politicians in Bonn, has always said the Nazi past barred Germans from countries like former Yugoslavia.

Scharping has dominated the headlines in Germany this week with his successful visit to Washington, where he reassured the Clinton administration that he was a firm centrist in foreign policy despite what his CDU opponents might say.

Frequently-broadcast television shots of him chatting with Clinton and several cabinet members – without an interpreter, unlike Kohl – helped offset his lack of experience abroad.

Without mentioning Yugoslavia, General Klaus Naumann, the top military commander, also said German troops should play a full role abroad like those of other countries.

He told ZDF television he had an “uneasy feeling” when he saw that Germans in Rwanda had to be evacuated by foreign – mostly Belgian – troops.

The SPD leads the CDU in opinion polls by roughly 40 percent to 35 percent support but Kohl has been catching up to Scharping in surveys measuring personal popularity.

Germany already participates in relief airdrops over Bosnia and helps to man the NATO alliance’s AWACS airplanes monitoring a United Nations no-fly zone over the republic.

But constitutional restrictions have blocked Bonn from sending troops outside NATO territory. The Constitutional Court is due to rule on the issue later this year.

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