Roger Hamburg, emeritus professor of political science and public administration at Indiana University South Bend, filed this report of his participation and impressions as a U.S. delegate to the 45th General Assembly of the Atlantic Treaty Association (ATA), held October 18–23, 1999 in Strasbourg, France.

I was invited to the 45th General Assembly as an academic associate of the Atlantic Council of the United States, an adjunct of NATO (which this year celebrates its 50th anniversary.) In previous years, I had attended related meetings in Washington, at NATO headquarters in Brussels (SHAPE), and at the 1991 European Union in Brussels. Last November, I was a delegate to the 44th annual ATA meeting held in Lisbon.

The meetings were held at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, designated after World War II as the capital of Europe’s parliamentary institutions. At the opening plenary session, President Jacques Chirac of France urged Europe to play a greater military role than it had in the past, a position he took partly out of French irritation with the “Anglos” and partly from European nervousness over the failure of the U.S. Congress to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.

I attended a number of sessions, including a panel discussion on the enlargement of NATO. Many expressed concern about what NATO’s new military post–Cold War mission would be and whether it would send ground troops to fight Kosovo-type wars. The panelists stressed non-military, non-“Article 5” missions. (Article 5 states that an attack on one NATO country is an attack on all, and each must consult with their respective parliaments to decide how to proceed in case of such an attack.) Assembly speaker Phillip Morillon, the French commander of the United Nations forces in Bosnia, opposed the possible use of ground troops in a combat role in areas like Kosovo, given the likely high number of casualties and Serbian army resistance to “a foreign invasion.”

Another session dealt with the Atlantic alliance and the Baltic republics of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, and whether to expand the alliance into those countries. H. E. Bernd Müttelburg, deputy diplomatic adviser to Chancellor Schroeder and Germany’s ambassador to Estonia, argued forcefully for NATO expansion, a position that implied concern and uncertainty over Russia’s unfolding domestic dramas and their possible effect on European security. A response by M. Evgeny Silin of the Russian Association for Euro-Atlantic Cooperation in Moscow seemed to indicate that Russia was willing to discuss expansion. Later, at a lunch arranged by a Germanist colleague and historian, Gerry Kleinfeld of Arizona State, Müttelburg reiterated that NATO—and by implication, the United States—has to be firm with the Russians, taking their interests into account but not being oversolicitous of their “perceptions.” At the meetings, the Lithuanian representative felt that his country could serve well as a bridge between Russia and the West to improve economic ties.

On a trip across the Rhine into Kehl, Germany, where it was market day, three of us observed a municipal election. Representaties of four German political parties—the Social Democrats, Christian Democrats, Free Democrats, and Greens—readily shared their political views with us, sometimes through Kleinfeld as translator, sometimes in English. Their readiness to use English, though, was in striking contrast to Strasbourg, where even our English-speaking guide seemed reluctant to speak English. And at the meetings, where English, French, German, Italian, Russian, Spanish, and Turkish are listed as the official languages for translation, only English and French were actually available.

At the conclusion of the assembly, more than 500 participants received a bronze medal as a memento of the event. The 46th meeting of the Assembly will be held in Budapest in the fall of 2000.