

Baden-Baden Casino, Famed for Dostoevsky, Dietrich, Hosts NATO

(Bloomberg) – President Barack Obama and NATO leaders will meet for dinner tonight at the casino in the German city of Baden-Baden, an establishment once frequented by the likes of actress Marlene Dietrich and writer Fyodor Dostoevsky.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization chiefs will discuss Afghanistan, alliance expansion and possibly a replacement for Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer. The backdrop will be the Kurhaus Casino, a complex that includes classic ballrooms and a 250-year-old salon outfitted with roulette, black jack and poker tables.

A reception will be held in the casino, while most other activities will take place in the site's concert halls, said spokeswoman Brigitte Goertz-Meissner of Kur & Tourismus GmbH.

"It's the classical centerpiece of the town," Goertz-Meissner said by phone from Baden-Baden. "We have several balls a year, including the New Year's ball. It's nothing unusual."

Once the playground of European nobility, the casino features an interior festooned with faded baroque décor that inspired Marlene Dietrich to call it "the most beautiful casino in the world." Dostoevsky was more interested in exploring an addiction to roulette in the novella "The Gambler."

In case the leaders care to take a spin at the roulette table or try out their poker faces in the most literal sense, business will be closed through April 4 (the establishment also has more than 130 automated gambling booths).

And in the spirit of the regulatory blueprint hammered out

yesterday at the Group of 20 summit meeting in London, gaming equipment has been removed.