

Extract from minutes of the 423rd meeting of the WEU Council held at ministerial level (London, 1 July 1971)

Caption: At the meeting of the Council of Western European Union (WEU) held at ministerial level in London on 1 July 1971, the British Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, emphasises the progress towards European economic unity. However, with regard to security, he notes that the Atlantic Alliance remains the basis of any defence arrangements, even if the WEU countries have a distinct shared interest based on geography and on European economic integration, and that the organisation constitutes a forum for the examination of global issues.

Source: Council of the Western European Union. Extract from minutes of the 423d meeting of WEU Council held at ministerial level on 1st July 1971 in London. CR (71) 14. 2 p. Archives nationales de Luxembourg (ANLux). <http://www.anlux.lu>. Western European Union Archives. Secretariat-General/Council's Archives. 1954-1987. Foundation and expansion of WEU. Year: 1971, 01/09/1970-30/11/1972. File 131.4. Volume 1/1.

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http://www.cvce.eu/obj/extract_from_minutes_of_the_423rd_meeting_of_the_weu_council_held_at_ministerial_level_london_1_july_1971-en-04afd78d-db83-4669-b189-3ab129bc9a6d.html



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EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF 423⁷ MEETING
OF W.E.U. COUNCIL HELD ON AT MINISTERIAL
LEVEL ON 1st July 1971 IN LONDON

FILE No.

CR (71) 14

The Chair was taken by the Rt. Hon.
Sir Alec DOUGLAS-HOME, United Kingdom Secretary of State
for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, and Chairman in
Office of the Council.

On behalf of his Government, Sir Alec warmly
welcomed delegations to this meeting, in London, of the
Ministerial Council of Western European Union.

He then made the following statement:

"We are within reach at last of achieving
economic unity in Europe, and here at W.E.U. with our
prospective partners in the Community, it is right to
recall the origins of the idea of Europe in its post-war
form.

Two visions inspired the idea for European
unity, the first being that by erecting a structure that
would serve all our interests we should preclude for ever
the fears and jealousies that have brought us into conflict
in the past. That structure is now taking shape. To the
generation that is growing up today, it will be inconceivable
that there should be war between neighbours in western Europe.

But there is also the second vision. It was that
Europe's common interest should be recognised and European
forces should work together for peace and security. The
North Atlantic Alliance have guaranteed that security for
20 years and must continue to provide the basis of our
defence arrangements. But W.E.U. is a reminder that we have
recognised from the beginning of that period a distinctly
western European defence interest. It is an interest based
on geography and now increasingly on European economic
integration.

Those are two factors which have a special permanence;
whatever changes there may be in the wider pattern of
international relations one constant element must now be
the security needs of a united western Europe. But the
emergence of common economic and security interests has
implications beyond the pooling of military resources. As
we get used to thinking in these terms it is inevitable that
we should seek a common view on a wider range of international
questions.

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Any issue that would concern us individually now will in due course quite naturally come to seem a question of European interest as a whole. I do not mean that any of us should seek to shuffle off on to our partners whatever burdens or responsibilities we bring with us from our past. But what I do mean is that it will be naturally for a united Europe to seek a united view on all the major international questions of the day.

The importance of W.E.U. has been that here we have made our tentative beginnings in that direction. We have used this forum to examine together a world-wide range of problems; this week's agenda is typical of the global scope of our discussions. We are clearly on the threshold of further evolution in this direction - evolution in the institutional framework and evolution in the degree of co-ordinating all our foreign policies. What will govern the pace of this evolution is the comprehension by the European peoples of the realities of our new position in the world.

Here the paradox is this: that it is the constructing in Europe of a structure that is recreating a European consciousness that once existed but was lost for several centuries. The concept of Europe as a Community of nations with a distinctive character and common interests emerged four hundred years ago as exploration and discovery extended our horizons. But commercial and colonial rivalry smothered the idea and when we speak of 'a European era in the 19th century' we mean that it was dominated by the world-wide competition between us - a negation of what the European idea means today. It has taken the growth of new forces in the world to turn the idea into a reality. But it is worth remembering now how old in fact it is, because it is a reminder that common economic and security interests are not the only foundations we have to build on.

The strongest basis of all for the unity of Europe is our common history and our common culture. Our national histories are inextricably bound up together divided only by language and certainly not by inspiration. It is above all this common heritage which gives me and my country confidence that what we are building now in Europe will last. And it is our desire to make the greatest contribution which the United Kingdom can bring to European unity."

V.M.

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