Extract from minutes of the 309th meeting of the WEU Council held at ministerial level (Bonn, 19 and 20 December 1966)

Caption: On 19 and 20 December 1966, the Council of Western European Union (WEU), chaired by Willy Brandt, meets at ministerial level in Bonn. The chairman invites his colleagues to consider the question of WEU's future. Jean de Broglie, the French delegate, expresses reservations as to whether the consequences for WEU of France's withdrawal from the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) should be discussed in the Ministerial Council. British delegate George Thomson also notes the Assembly's concern at the marginalisation of WEU in the decision-making process for the United Kingdom's accession to the European Economic Community, while emphasising that NATO should remain the focal point for discussions on defence matters.

Source: Council of the Western European Union. Extract from minutes of 309th meeting of WEU Council held at ministerial level on 19th and 20th December 1966 in Bonn, II.Political consultation. CR (66) 26. part I. p.1, p. 13-14. Archives nationales de Luxembourg (ANLux). http://www.anlux.lu. Western European Union Archives. BTO. Interpretation of Brussels Treaty & Paris Protocols. Year: 1966, 01/03/1966-30/03/1967. File 113.2. Volume 1/2.

URL:
http://www.cvce.eu/obj/extract_from_minutes_of_the_309th_meeting_of_the_weu_council_held_at_ministerial_level_bonn_19_and_20_december_1966-en-69530ef9-df7b-4d37-9043-51984fd4722c.html

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EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF 309th MEETING OF W.E.U. COUNCIL HELD ~~ON~~ AT MINISTERIAL LEVEL ON 19th & 20th DECEMBER 1966 IN BONN

Chairman: Mr. Willy Brandt, German Foreign Minister

II Political Consultation.

1. Statement by Chairman in Office on results & Conclusions of the Second part of the 12th Ord. Session of the Assembly.

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The Chairman went on to speak of the debate on proposals tabled by Mr. Kirk, British delegate, at the last session; the Assembly had every right to discuss the future of W.E.U. Twelve years had passed since the Organisation came into being and many things had happened during that time, in the East as well as in the West. Changes had occurred in some of the conditions on which W.E.U.'s work was formerly based, and careful consideration would undoubtedly have to be given to determine how far such developments should be taken into account; in other words, how to adjust W.E.U.'s structure and working methods to the political and military realities of contemporary Europe. Without wishing to discuss Mr. Kirk's recommendations in detail, the Chairman said that the future of W.E.U. would be a matter of continuing concern to the Ministers and the subject should be referred to the Permanent Council in London. The Assembly's proposals and recommendations could provide a useful working basis for this study, although they did not of course contain instant solutions to all problems. It was desirable that the Permanent Council should be requested to carry out a thorough survey of the whole question of W.E.U.'s future; it was a matter calling for careful and urgent consideration.

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PART I

Concluding his brief survey of the Assembly's work, the Chairman observed that the Permanent Council would have occasion to examine the parliamentarians' proposals more closely when they came to reply to the recommendations. These should be dealt with by the Council with great care, in order to encourage the Assembly to continue furnishing new ideas for the enrichment and guidance of discussions within W.E.U.

If it was agreed that the Permanent Council should be asked to undertake a detailed study of these questions - which would seem necessary - the Chairman asked his colleagues whether they wished to make any statement on the recent session of the Assembly.

Mr. THOMSON wished to say how glad he was that the present meeting was being presided over by Mr. Brandt. He thanked the German Foreign Minister for his comprehensive report on the recent W.E.U. Assembly proceedings and for the keenly appreciated speech that he had made to the Assembly.

Mr. Thomson agreed with Mr. Brandt that it was important that the Council of Ministers should pay careful attention to the Assembly debates and to their replies to Assembly recommendations. Recent developments in N.A.T.O. and the renewed British approaches to the E.E.C. had to some degree bypassed W.E.U. and this was causing a growing sense of restlessness in the Assembly. This was partly, of course, inevitable. N.A.T.O. was bound to be the focal point for discussions on defence and the discussions between the United Kingdom and other EFTA countries and the member governments of the Six about the possibility of a wider European Economic Community, were bound to take place outside the forum of W.E.U. Nevertheless, the W.E.U. Council and Assembly, which provided a meeting place between the Six and the United Kingdom, could be an important body in which Western policies could be harmonised, not only in respect of Europe but also in respect of the rest of the world.

Amongst the Assembly reports, all of which Mr. Thomson commended to the Council, was the report prepared by Mr. Peter Kirk on the future of W.E.U. Whilst there might be reservations on some of the ideas contained in that report, it appeared nonetheless that the report itself and the Assembly debate on it had focussed attention on some of the important questions facing the Organisation. No international body could or should be immutable, and certainly no European body could be immutable in the present changing circumstances of Europe. The member Governments must be ready to adjust their objectives in W.E.U. and, if necessary, the Organisation itself to the changes that were taking place. In Europe and in the Atlantic area this was a period of change, and it was hoped that sooner rather than later there would be an enlarged European Community. As the discussions the previous week in Paris had shown, The North Atlantic Alliance itself was undergoing radical re-organisation. The NATO Parliamentarians' Conference had proposed the establishment of a formal Atlantic Assembly. The Council would now therefore have to face the questions raised by this report to the Assembly.

Mr. van ELSLANDE wanted to dwell for a moment on a problem that had been raised by Mr. Thomson - the connections that obviously existed between the Brussels Treaty on the one hand and the North Atlantic Treaty on the other. The Belgian delegation felt that this was a very real problem, and one that should not be dodged. For this reason they proposed that the meeting should not only express a wish that the Permanent Council give their attention to this question, but should give them definite and precise instructions. He had a text drafted by the Belgian delegation that he would like to put before the meeting. The Belgian delegation did not, of course, swear by each and every word - it was no more than a general line of approach that they would like to put forward. This text would be as follows :

"In view of the links between the modified Brussels Treaty and the North Atlantic Treaty, the Permanent Council of W.E.U. are invited :

1. To keep themselves informed of the progress of work and negotiations within the Alliance and its Organisation;

2. To discuss and determine, as far as possible, the effects, if any, on the modified Brussels Treaty of any measures taken or to be taken within the Alliance and its Organisation to adapt themselves to the political situation;

3. To submit a preliminary report which might be considered by the Ministerial Council at their meeting in Rome in April 1967."

M. CLASEN welcomed the proposal that the Assembly recommendations should be discussed in the Council in London. He considered that the suggestion made by the Belgian delegation would also be helpful.

M. de BROGLIE observed that Item 1) on the agenda referred to a statement by the Chairman on the Assembly's work, but made no provision for a debate on the subject. Naturally, there could be no objection to the examination by the Permanent Council of an eminently technical problem such as the effect of France's withdrawal from NATO on W.E.U.; but the French delegation wished to enter the most formal reserve regarding the initiation of such a debate in the Ministerial Council.

The CHAIRMAN said that, at the end of his statement, he had asked the representatives of the member governments whether they wished to give their views. This was a middle way between discussion and silence. He therefore proposed that the Permanent Council should take account in their deliberations of the statements made by Ministers and, in particular, the comments of the Belgian Minister.