

Extract from minutes of the 250th meeting of the WEU Council held at ministerial level (Brussels, 16 April 1964)

Caption: At the 250th meeting of the Council of Western European Union (WEU), held at ministerial level on 16 April 1964 in Brussels, the delegations discuss the development of East–West relations. British Foreign Secretary Richard Austen Butler and his French counterpart Michel Habib-Deloncle stress the fact that the USSR is currently preoccupied with internal problems and the Sino-Soviet dispute, which is not just affecting the Soviet satellite countries but the global communist movement as a whole. France and the United Kingdom are prepared to maintain a dialogue with the USSR but they emphasise the fact that Western Europe must remain vigilant towards the Soviet Union. On the matter of disarmament, the Soviet Union is not contributing any constructive ideas and it does not seem to be prepared to examine the substance of the issue of arms control.

Source: Council of the Western European Union. Extract from minutes of 250th meeting of WEU Council held on 16 April 1964 at ministerial level in Brussels. CR (64) 10. Part I. pp. 11-21. 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: 1963, 01/10/1963-30/11/1965. File 132.15. Volume 1/7.

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EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF 250th MEETING
OF W.E.U. COUNCIL HELD ON 16 April 1964
at ministerial level in Brussels

I. APPROVAL OF THE DRAFT AGENDA

(CM (64) 7)

[M. FAYAT]

The CHAIRMAN submitted the draft agenda for approval.

The COUNCIL:

APPROVED the draft agenda in document
CM (64) 7.

The CHAIRMAN then referred to the suggestion made by Mr. Luns at the last ministerial meeting, held in London on 23rd January, that the Council consider the possibility of strengthening the W.E.U. machinery for consultation. Since Mr. Luns was absent from the present session, and as M. Couve de Murville, who had also spoken on this matter, was not present either, it would perhaps be preferable to defer consideration of this suggestion until the next meeting. The Chairman enquired the views of delegations.

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The decisive motive for the Soviets' political moderation should, however, Mr. Schroeder continued, still be sought in the lesson the Soviets had learnt from the Western attitude in the 1962 Cuban crisis, namely that in harming the vital interests of the West there was a limit, the danger of atomic war, which even the Soviets might not overstep without risking self-destruction.

During the last few months, what is known as pluralism had continued to grow in Eastern Europe. Following the Sino-Soviet conflicts, various trends had emerged which the Soviets were strenuously trying to counteract. Their efforts in this respect were illustrated by Bulgarian Party leader Zhivkov's visit to Moscow, Khrushchev's visit to Hungary and the Polish leaders' visit to Moscow. In the Soviet-occupied part of Germany, the movement towards autonomy of the Eastern European countries was rejected, because here there was none of the independent and national element that formed the main driving power behind pluralism in the Soviet-occupied zone, such a national element would of course be bound to demand reunification.

Any Eastern European trend towards independence must therefore emphasise the dependence of East Berlin on Moscow and promote the so-called Stalinist element. Conversely, it increased Moscow's interest in Pankow. It was significant that the agreements with Poland, Hungary and Rumania on the establishment of trade missions by the German Federal Republic had prompted the rulers of East Berlin to level vehement criticism at their Communist "brothers". It was interesting that Bulgaria, undeterred by East Berlin criticism, had concluded an agreement with the German Federal Republic on establishment of trade missions.

In Mr. Schroeder's view, the West should make every effort to promote this development in Eastern Europe, although the possibility of achieving immediate success with such a policy should be assessed with caution. The Kremlin's power of influence on these countries and their dependence on Moscow were still the dominating element in the Eastern European political landscape. This fact had been clearly confirmed again by Khrushchev's visit to Hungary.

The Federal Government hoped to encourage these recent developments. Now that they had agreed the establishment of trade missions with most of the Eastern European countries, they proposed to direct their efforts to intensifying cultural exchanges.

Mr. BUTLER could in general accept the diagnosis of Mr. Schroeder concerning East-West relations. In particular, he agreed about the Soviet preoccupation with the Sino-Soviet dispute, upon which major speeches were being made at frequent intervals by Mr. Khrushchev. He also shared the view that Soviet concern with their agricultural and

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economic problems caused them to look inwards rather than outwards. The Russians did not appear at present to be in a mood to make substantial progress towards a settlement of the major problems, and Mr. Butler was interested to hear that the German Foreign Minister agreed that there had been no basic change in Soviet policy towards Germany. The Soviets apparently felt that if they had to negotiate they would have to make concessions which would be too far-reaching. In this connection, the Tass Agency statement of the previous month, couched in the usual harsh terms, did not show any signs of a new policy. This appeared to confirm that there was no immediate intention of making advances to the German Federal Republic, but rather to bolster up East Germany.

Mr. Butler then reverted to the main problems which appeared to be occupying the Soviet mind. After five months of considerable restraint in the face of increasingly bitter Chinese attacks, Mr. Khrushchev had made a speech the previous day in which he had said that the problem was not merely ideological, and had warned his hearers that the Chinese were attempting in reality to dominate the world with their own form of Communism. The Soviets now wished to hold a new conference of Communist parties to consider the dispute. This seemed to have aroused considerable misgivings among some of Russia's firmest supporters and it was obvious that their dilemma would not be easy to settle, faced as they were with an indefinite continuation of the present Chinese challenge to the Soviet leadership of the world Communist movement. In this connection, Mr. Schroeder's remarks concerning developments in the satellite countries, particularly Rumania, were of particular interest. It seemed that in certain other of these countries there was also a considerable movement, for instance in Poland, and this showed the wisdom of the German attitude in encouraging trade contacts with the satellites. The British view was that it could be valuable at the present time to do some fishing in these troubled waters. If ever there had been a time when the Communists were engaged on a discussion of their beliefs, now was that time; whatever efforts were made to disguise the fact, there was no general agreement within the brotherhood of the Communist world. For these reasons it seemed unlikely that the Soviets would be able to look outwards. However, a Communist movement divided against itself was obviously a less dangerous threat to Western interests than one which was united.

In this connection, Mr. Butler foresaw that when Africa came to be discussed, the competition between Peking and Moscow for leadership there and in other outlying bastions, such as Indo-China, would be apparent.

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What should be the attitude of the West in the face of this Communist preoccupation both with their own political problems and, in the case of the Soviets at any rate, with their own economic problems? Mr. Butler did not think that the West should be deterred thereby from putting ideas to the Soviets. On the contrary, he stressed the need for the Allies to maintain contacts and continue exchanges of views with the Russians.

Mr. Butler then turned to the question of disarmament. Judging by his contacts with the Soviets at Geneva during his recent visit, and Mr. Gromyko's subsequent onslaught, it did not seem that the U.S.S.R. had any very new or constructive ideas to put forward in this field. In fact, they seemed almost jealous of the constructive attitude taken by Mr. Butler, and to be desirous of showing that this was not wanted at the present time. They were much concerned at their heavy military expenditure, but did not seem ready yet to face the problem of verification on which further progress in the negotiations depended. The best hope for this Conference seemed to be to try to make progress on the so-called collateral measures; the British Government hoped in particular that progress could be made on measures designed to prevent surprise attack, and that their paper on observation posts would receive consideration. During his visit, Mr. Butler had attempted to get the Conference to set up activity at a working level, but even this suggestion had been attacked by Mr. Gromyko. His impression was that there was a great danger of the Conference continuing with nothing but a series of general speeches leading to no practical result; detailed discussion was therefore vital. He had, however, been encouraged by the fact that the neutral members of the Conference had welcomed his remarks.

The United Kingdom was at present examining with the United States and the Soviet Union proposals concerning the limitation of fissile material for warlike purposes. On this matter, the Soviets were showing some signs of constructive thought, which seemed to bear out what Mr. Butler had said previously concerning the need for patience despite an apparently unpromising situation.

Even in the case of the problem of Germany and Berlin, provided the West adhered to its principles and maintained the solidarity of the Alliance, it seemed worthwhile keeping contact with the Soviets to see whether any new proposals could be considered. Furthermore, Western diplomacy should take advantage of the great uncertainty existing in the Communist world to make what contacts they could and thus take advantage of the differences of opinion existing there.

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The question of China, to which M. Spaak had referred at The Hague meeting, and of the future of the Communist world, was probably one of the most important of the day, and M. Spaak had shown great foresight when he regretted that insufficient consideration had been given to it.

Mr. Butler hoped that the member countries would continue to exchange views about how their diplomacy could profit from the rifts in the Communist world and that contact could be maintained between the various Foreign Offices on this subject.

M. HABIB DELONCLE shared the view that East-West relations were dominated by the Sino-Soviet quarrel. The outcome was a kind of pause or change in international relations, but this was not the same thing as peace; they must wait and see where this lull was likely to lead and this was not very easy to determine.

As had just been mentioned, the curtain had been to some extent lifted as regards China and the U.S.S.R. There was an open breach between the two countries and the impression gained was that as the quarrel grew, ideological disputes were being replaced by real quarrels relating to the possession of nuclear weapons, the frontier between China and the U.S.S.R. and the Chinese attempt to monopolise the movement for the liberation of coloured peoples. The recent texts quoted were increasingly explicit on these points. The Chinese demanded the removal of Krushchev, which the Russians regarded as unwarrantable interference in the internal affairs of the U.S.S.R.; in Krushchev's view, the Chinese had gone mad and were utter traitors to Marxism-Leninism.

That was the position. Clearly, if China and the U.S.S.R. were alone in the Communist world, they would have to settle the matter directly. But the Communist movement was unitary; many parties were rent by the quarrel in India, Brazil, Australia, Ceylon and even in Europe. The small parties felt themselves to be vulnerable and weak and were trying to avoid making any definite choice. For example, the Vietnamese Communist party had tried for a long time to check the dispute; because of its geographical position Vietnam had to work with Peking, but it was easy to understand why the Vietnamese Communists wanted unanimity to be maintained or restored. Only the other day, the Rumanian Communist party had acted as intermediary between the U.S.S.R. and China to try and bring the two adversaries together, today its silence spoke louder than words. The Russians had revived the idea of a world conference of the Communist movement to condemn the Chinese. The Chinese minority, both at international level and in each national party, would have to surrender or withdraw from the movement.

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Parties other than the Russian Communists were not unreservedly in favour of such a proposal. Both the Italians and the Poles had expressed doubts, fearing that such a meeting might increase divisions in the Communist world. Finally, there was good reason to believe - confirmed by the remarks made concerning the satellites in another context - that the parties in the Peoples' Democracies might fear a breakdown as likely to strengthen Soviet control in Europe, with the result that the so-called European parties would cease to enjoy the relative independence they had gained under cover of the Sino-Soviet dispute. Such a meeting, therefore, raised numerous problems and it could easily be deduced that, in the eyes of the Communist world, all the sins were not on one side and that, despite the obvious chauvinism of the Chinese, the U.S.S.R.'s determination to maintain its supremacy in the Communist movement was not always very welcome. In this context, it might be wondered whether the picture which the Russians had given, or tried to give, of the Chinese was really accurate. Very recently, while in Hungary, Krushchev had spoken of them as warmongers. Against this, the Chinese were trying to portray Krushchev as a modern revisionist. It was perhaps not all quite so simple, but these two images were the basis from which one must start, shading them down in order to assess the significance of the quarrel for the West.

M. Habib Deloncle was of the opinion that the Chinese certainly did not want a world war. One of the purposes of Chou en Lai's visit to Africa was to remove that impression. By visiting the King of Morocco and M. Bourguiba, the Chinese Prime Minister had helped to give a picture of Chinese policy more in line with the true facts and, thus, closer to Soviet policy; that is, the idea of a short-term pragmatic policy, however revolutionary the general principles applied.

The Chinese were no doubt more militant than the Russians, a tendency which was favoured by the actual structure of the Asiatic world. The Asian countries were relatively weak and could not easily be protected by the American presence. Communist China was well placed to direct a political and military threat against her neighbours and principally against India and the Indo-Chinese peninsula. Limited successes around the periphery of this area would be a double victory for China at one blow. Communism would advance as it had not been doing for the last fifteen years, and such progress would be achieved within the Chinese sphere of influence. This militant aspect showed through the very violent speech made by Chou en Lai at Algiers to the FLN, which he no doubt regarded as the leading revolutionary party in Africa.

/The Soviet ...

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The Soviet answer to this was a more temporising policy which in their view was not without its successes, including the winning of Cuba for Communism, the progress of the Italian Communist Party and the extension of Russian influence in the uncommitted world since 1956. This anxiety to advance was part of the traditional Communist line, but the U.S.S.R. was forced to obtain support from the moderate wings of the Party, in countries such as Yugoslavia and Italy. This regrouping was reinforcing the tendency towards internal liberalisation and greater flexibility in Russia's approach to her European partners. At the same time, it was intensifying the rivalry with China, in Africa for example, in the context of the revolutionary movement. This in no way meant that the U.S.S.R. no longer intended to act against various Western interests in the areas concerned. In M. Habib Deloncle's view, the complex character of the whole problem had perhaps not been fully analysed in the West. The Sino-Soviet crisis seemed to mark a weakening of the Communist movement; the difficulty of directing the whole movement in the presence of a second, dissident revolutionary focus, the problems arising in connection with the organisation of a conference, and the possibility of an open breach, were all examples of this dispersal of the movement's strength. Despite the fact of a breach between Peking and Moscow, both capitals of the Communist movement still claimed to be expansionist, one following the post-war Stalinist position, but in Asia, the other as a more long-term operation, with increasing pressure on Europe and as an effort to circumvent the United States by winning greater, if less concentrated, influence in the uncommitted world. It was difficult to know whether the weakening due to division, or a combination of two different strategies which still agreed in not abandoning the struggle, would prove stronger in the long run.

M. Habib Deloncle proposed to consider more closely what was happening in Europe. In Germany, the U.S.S.R. seemed to have abandoned direct pressure of the type applied between 1958 and 1962. Did this mean that the situation had really improved? The U.S.S.R. no doubt hoped to derive some benefit from the policy at present followed with regard to the Federal Republic. Russia was trying to isolate the Federal Republic from her allies, was attacking and reviling her, but at the same time was making veiled offers either through the Berlin authorities on the question of passes or by suggesting that many problems could be solved if the Bonn Government showed more interest in a rapprochement with the U.S.S.R. This was

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yet another reason why the West must remain on guard, and M. Habib Deloncle shared the views expressed by the two previous speakers. The U.S.S.R. did not yet appear ready to seek a genuine rapprochement with the West on the German problem. This point should be borne in mind, even if as some people thought, and as previous speakers had suggested, discussions with the Soviet Union must be continued.

In the field of disarmament, the Russians were still, in the view of M. Habib Deloncle, directing their efforts to the same target, namely a kind of disengagement in central Europe. If Russia was at present concentrating on opposition to the idea of a multilateral force, this was only one aspect of her continuing policy. At the end of 1963, the Polish Government had again put forward the idea of disengaged zones with the Gomulka Plan, which was an advance on the Rapacki Plan but very similar in that it suggested the temporary freezing of nuclear armaments. In the speaker's view, this proposal had the same drawbacks; quite apart from its impracticability, mainly due to the difficulty of control, the Polish plan would freeze the West's tactical weapons in Western Germany, but would leave the threat of the medium-range rockets stationed in the U.S.S.R. The freeze proposed as the first stage in the Rapacki Plan would lead sooner or later to denuclearisation of the zone controlled. Thus, it still involved reduced military strength or disengagement without any political counterpart. In this respect, the Polish plan was too close to Russia's own proposals on the subject of European security not to be supported by Moscow. In this context, a genuine wish for compromise was no more evident in the Polish scheme than in Russia's present general attitude to disarmament. A cautious policy should be adopted in relation to the Soviet proposals; the lines along which a solution was at present being sought, or apparently so, could not easily be explored without the West rapidly becoming aware that its interests might be jeopardised.

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Finally, in the matter of trade, the U.S.S.R. was trying to obtain capital goods by granting credits, a fact which largely explained the present difficulties of the Soviet economy. However, the general lines of Soviet foreign policy in the uncommitted world suggested that such transactions should not be undertaken lightly. M. Habib Deloncle thought that it would be preferable to seek ways and means of making arrangements with the Eastern European countries individually, thus increasing the independence of the countries concerned in relation to Russia and giving them a better understanding of their links with Western Europe.

The speaker did not wish to deal at length with the relations of the U.S.S.R. and the other Communist countries with the under-developed countries, since Africa was shortly to be discussed. He would, however, point out that Soviet failures in Africa had been the most obvious sign of the obstacles to Communist expansion in the continent. The Russians themselves acknowledged that they had to overcome pluralist tendencies in the uncommitted world and one interesting outcome of the Afro-Asian Conference was that the under-developed countries were not prepared to be dragged into the internal disputes of the Communist movement. One had only to consider what had happened on that occasion and the scornful tone adopted by a number of African delegates regarding the ideological disputes which had occupied most of the Algiers meeting. The Communist movement was therefore facing the possibility of the emergence of revolutionary regimes which might be anti-Western, but would remain independent of that movement; the problem which had arisen in Cuba might thus be repeated - a country claiming to be Communist, Marxist and Leninist, but remaining basically nationalistic and revolutionary in its own fashion, thus escaping from the central control of the Communist movement and liable to involve the latter in risky ventures, without offering any of the safeguards which the European Communist countries had provided hitherto. The new states in Asia and Africa remained unstable and offered scope for Communist exploitation; however, the Communists would no doubt have to give way to, and accept, individualism if they were to have any future hope of taking advantage of extremist elements within the existing structures.

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M. Habib Deloncle concluded by saying that, having regard to all these facts, Western Europe should pursue a vigilant and varied policy in relation to the Communist movement; he wished to stress this point. The East-West European axis remained extremely vulnerable because of the division of Germany and the unbalanced potential of Western Europe and the U.S.S.R. from the strategic point of view. In the other continents, they should pursue the same objectives, but their approach could in some cases vary quite considerably. No illusions should be entertained regarding the nature of the struggle nor the determination of the adversary, even if he were now divided; at the same time, the struggle could be carried on in some parts of the world in a more flexible manner than had been the case ten years ago.

In response to a query from Mr. Butler as to the meaning of the term "politique différenciée", M. Habib Deloncle said that at a time when the Eastern world was losing its monolithic character, it could be useful, in certain parts of the world where the Communist menace was less direct and concentrated than in Europe, for the Western powers themselves to present somewhat varying attitudes.

M. LUPIS recalled that the Vice-President of the Soviet Supreme Council had recently visited Italy, on the occasion of the exhibition of Soviet industrial products at Genoa. When in Rome, he had had conversations with the Italian Government, during which he had shown great interest in the possibility of developing commercial exchanges. On the political side, there had been the usual review of current problems, but this had taken place in very general, one could even say superficial, terms and each side had contented itself with restating its position. The Vice-President had not shown himself at all aggressive on these matters, nor had he engaged in polemics. Finally, he had avoided all appearance of seeking contacts with the Italian Communist party, so much so, that this party had apparently been somewhat disappointed.

Mr. de BLOCK had taken note with interest of the views expressed by previous speakers, and fully agreed with the need to maintain the solidarity of the West in order to avoid any danger of a wedge being driven between the members of the Alliance.

[M. FAYAT]

The CHAIRMAN thought it could be said that a most satisfactory exchange of views had taken place on the question of East-West relations. The previous speakers seemed to share the same anxieties and to have reached very similar conclusions in their analysis of the position of the main protagonists in the Sino-Soviet dispute.

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As regards the U.S.S.R., it was clear that two factors had had a certain tranquillising effect on its policies: the economic situation, particularly the agricultural crisis, and the so-called Cuban crisis. A further and increasingly restraining influence seemed to have been the Sino-Soviet dispute, and this influence appeared to extend over the whole Eastern bloc. Mr. Schroeder had also referred to its importance, but had stressed that whatever favourable influence it might have over Soviet policy, the hard core remained the same, that is to say, the attitude of the U.S.S.R. to Central and Eastern Europe.

The main difference between the policies of the Soviets and the Chinese appeared to be that the former were more interested in their relationship with Europe and the United States, that is, the position where the West was strongest, and the latter in those parts of the world where the Western position was weaker. What should the reaction of the West be? Several speakers had dealt with this point, and all had stressed that whatever happened, the West must remain vigilant. This did not mean, however, in the Chairman's view, that no attempt should be made to see where a more flexible attitude could be obtained from the U.S.S.R.

M. Habib Deloncle had pointed to the possibility that the Soviets might be trying to isolate the United States from their allies, and this must be avoided at all costs. Indeed, it would be no compensation, if cracks developed in the Western Alliance, to know that there was a rift in the Communist world.

Where the interests of the West were world-wide, the members of the Alliance must reach some global political strategy. They must remain on their guard, despite the more restrained nature of the Soviet attitude. All possibilities should be explored for intensified contacts with Eastern European countries, and exploitation of the situation there; the ultimate aim must continue, however, to be the protection of Western interests whilst seeking by every means possible a real détente in the world.