

Extract from minutes of the 289th meeting of the WEU Council held at ministerial level (London, 15 and 16 March 1966)

Caption: The meetings of the Council of Western European Union (WEU), held in London on 15 and 16 March 1966, are chaired by British Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart. Before discussing East–West relations, the chairman raises the question of the situation in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), particularly in view of France’s decision to withdraw from NATO’s command structure. Michael Stewart believes that this decision calls into question France’s commitments under the modified Brussels Treaty and expresses doubts as to the legality of the French decision, which undermines the very basis of NATO’s existence. Jean de Broglie, French State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, reassures those present that France remains committed to the European integration process and that it wishes to change the NATO of 1949, which it believes is no longer in line with current realities.

Source: Council of the Western European Union. Extract from minutes of 289th meeting of WEU Council held in London at ministerial level on 15th and 16th March 1966 . II. Political consultation. CR (66)6. Part I. pp. 8-14. 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.

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EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF 289th MEETING CR 666

OF W.E.U. COUNCIL HELD IN LONDON

AT MINISTERIAL LEVEL, 15 + 16

March. 1966.

Chairman: Mr. Michael Stewart

II. POLITICAL CONSULTATION

Before discussing the next item on the agenda, East-West relations, the CHAIRMAN wished to make some preliminary remarks about the situation in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. The recent pronouncements made by France about NATO had been studied and these matters would, of course, be discussed in NATO itself. There were, however, certain reasons why Western European Union had a special concern in this matter. In the first place, obligations undertaken in accordance with the revised Brussels Treaty still had many years to run and were in some respects even more binding than the obligations of the North Atlantic Treaty. Secondly, the Brussels Treaty Powers, by their Resolution of 20th December 1950, had decided that they would not have a separate military organisation of their own, but would rely on the NATO structure. There was now, therefore, a position where the Brussels Treaty Powers had undertaken obligations to each other but had decided to rely upon the military structure of NATO to carry out those obligations. Thus, any weakening of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

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called into question the obligations of the Brussels Treaty and had to be regarded as a matter of grave concern, not only to NATO but also to Western European Union.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation depended legally on Articles 3 and 9 of the North Atlantic Treaty and the proposal that French forces should be removed from NATO Command contravened the undertaking of the London Conference of 1954, which had been endorsed by the North Atlantic Council in October of that year. By the terms of this undertaking, all forces of NATO countries in Europe were subject to SACEUR, except such forces as NATO itself recognised as being suitable for national command. It had been realised at that time that an integrated structure was a necessary instrument for making the Treaty effective and all countries concerned believed that the Treaty and the Organisation should continue. The United Kingdom was concerned not only with legality but with the solid reality of the situation. There might be some danger that the very success of the Treaty and the Organisation in averting and reducing the threat, existing at the time the Treaty was signed and the Organisation formed, might lead some to the erroneous conclusion that the need for the Organisation had disappeared. But it should be recalled that all the Western neighbours of the Soviet Union, with the exception of Turkey, a member of NATO, had been reduced to varying degrees of subjection.

It was clear that the preservation of both individual and national liberties in Western Europe depended on the continued vigour of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and not just on the Treaty, which was no more than an undertaking by the various parties to it to come to each other's help in time of need. A treaty alone in that sense did not make an alliance. An organisation as well as a treaty was needed in the circumstances which we faced in Europe. This was not, of course, to abandon the hope that, in time, a better and fuller understanding could be reached between the countries of Western Europe and the Soviet Union. There was a much greater hope of reaching better understanding if it was very clear to the Soviet Government that the countries of Western Europe remained firmly united. It was on this unity that the strength of our defence and any more long-term prospects for better understanding depended. Mr. Stewart hoped that France herself, on further consideration of this matter, of great concern, not only to Governments but to the general public throughout Europe, would see that the maintenance of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, on which her partners laid such stress, was in her own interests no less than in the interests of any of the other countries signatory to the Treaty.

/Mr. LUNS ...

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Mr. LUNS said that the Netherlands delegation could well appreciate Mr. Stewart's reasons for reminding the Council, in his opening statement, that they themselves had decided that the aims of the Brussels Treaty could only be fulfilled through the NATO military structure, and they fully shared the British Government's concern at the course of action which France now intended to pursue. They, too, would emphasise the importance of the North Atlantic Treaty and its machinery and the continuing need for an integrated defence organisation, representing the common interests of the allies on both sides of the Atlantic. The Netherlands Government would steadily adhere to these policies and would strive to achieve a practical and even closer degree of co-operation with their NATO partners.

So far as Western European Union itself was concerned, Mr. Luns drew attention to the very explicit obligations binding on all the Brussels Treaty Powers, and he expressed the sincere hope that no signatory country would now feel they were no longer committed to the same extent. Indeed, recent events had served only to enhance the importance of the Treaty and especially of its military provisions.

Mr. SCHROEDER said that the German Government welcomed the early opportunity afforded by the Council of Ministers to express their concern at recent démarches taken by the French Government. Both the Chairman and Mr. Luns had pointed out the close connection which existed between W.E.U. and NATO; any changes to the latter were bound to have repercussions on the structure of W.E.U. The seven countries were all committed to supplying mutual assistance in accordance with Article V of the Brussels Treaty. As far as the military organisation was concerned, W.E.U. was entirely based on NATO. For both political and military reasons, Germany would be in favour of continuing the work which had already been achieved in W.E.U. and NATO. Mr. Schroeder agreed

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with the previous speakers that the basic situation, which the two treaties were designed to meet, had in no way changed; indeed, both treaties had proved their worth, having insured the preservation of peace by virtue of their deterrent effect. In the political field, the North Atlantic Alliance had greatly contributed to the stability of the free world and should
: continue to do so. In fact, only the NATO Organisation
: would ensure that all members immediately took appropriate
: defensive action in case of attack, and it made possible the presence of the United States in Europe, which was a vital feature of the whole defence structure. Lastly, it was through NATO alone that the smaller countries could play their full part in a modern defence system.

During the next few months, these questions would be closely studied by the North Atlantic Council; they should be handled with the greatest tact, but also in the atmosphere of frankness which the situation undoubtedly merited. When considering whether any changes should be made, the issue of security should predominate; Germany was convinced that individual and collective security could only be ensured by means of an effective alliance in which all members participated on equal terms, guaranteeing the possibility of freedom, progress and peaceful development for each of them.

M. LUPIS had listened with the closest attention to previous speakers' statements on the attitude recently adopted by the French Government in relation to NATO.

The Italian Government were fully aware of
: the gravity of the problem, which called for the
: greatest solidarity between member countries if frank
: and constructive discussions were to be held with France.

M. Lupis wished first to recall that, speaking before the Senate on 3rd March, the Italian Prime Minister had said that Italy's foreign policy, with national peace and security as its fundamental aim, continued to be based on loyalty to the Atlantic Alliance with its attendant military and political obligations. He had added that the bond of the Alliance and the integration which rendered it truly effective were essential for security and world equilibrium and, therefore, for peace and the relaxation of East-West tension.

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When the debate was wound up on 8th March, M. Moro had confirmed these principles in the following declaration: "The Atlantic Alliance was formed at a time of grave danger for the Western world. Contrary to certain pessimistic forecasts, it has not threatened but preserved peace and has opened the way for discussions from a position of strength between East and West; all members of the Alliance including Italy believe that a favourable development of the international situation may depend on the continuation of such discussions in a calm atmosphere. Some speakers have referred to the double danger of a resurgence of nationalistic ideas - which might multiply dangerously - and of an increase in the number of atomic powers. I am afraid that the re-emergence of pluralism on the international scene in the atomic age does not offer favourable prospects for world peace. It is the duty of organisations which maintain the balance of power to work for a stable, humane and peaceful basis for international relations. Italy will certainly be guided by these fundamental principles of security, equilibrium and peace, when, together with her allies, she shall examine the achievements of the Atlantic Alliance and take decisions on the improvement of its structure on an integrated basis and on its development into a genuine economic and political community of equals."

These were the terms of M. Moro's declaration. The Italian constitutional position did not allow M. Lupis to state his country's attitude in more detail at the moment; this would be done by the Government as soon as the new Cabinet had been given a vote of confidence by the two Houses of Parliament. The principles which the Italian Government intended to follow had, however, been clearly defined by the Prime Minister. As regards W.E.U., M. Lupis simply wished to add that it presupposed the existence and continuation of the present structure of NATO, by virtue of Article IV of the modified Brussels Treaty and other basic provisions of the Paris Agreements.

M. FISCHBACH ...

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M. FISCHBACH largely shared the views expressed by previous speakers, in particular by the Chairman. There were undoubtedly very close legal and political links between W.E.U. and NATO, so that anything which weakened the latter and, more specifically, any action which affected its present military structure would inevitably have repercussions on Western European Union, whose existence might even be jeopardised. The Luxembourg Government firmly believed that W.E.U. had a useful role to play in Europe; it would obviously be unable to do so properly without the necessary political cohesion between the seven countries. Without going into the many problems raised by France's attitude to NATO, which would be discussed in that Organisation, M. Fischbach therefore wished to reaffirm Luxembourg's loyalty to the Atlantic Alliance and her support for its organisation, which had formed the very basis of her Government's foreign policy for seventeen years. They were strongly of the opinion that, in the modern world, marked by interdependence in every sphere, the security of all member countries could only be properly guaranteed by an integrated defence system. The Luxembourg Government were therefore deeply disturbed by the situation created in Europe by the French decision.

M. van den BOSCH began by saying that he had been asked to convey the apologies of the Belgian Minister for Foreign Affairs, who had been unable to leave Brussels because of internal political developments. M. Spaak regretted that he could not attend for that reason, particularly as he would have liked to speak personally on Belgium's attitude to both the North Atlantic Treaty and the Brussels Treaty. In his absence, M. van den Bosch would simply recall that Belgium's position regarding the North Atlantic Treaty was well-known. She was completely loyal not merely to the Alliance and the agreements arising from it, but also to all undertakings entered into under the Treaty of Washington. For Belgium, the Atlantic Alliance was an essential element in political and military collaboration, as established between the Western countries after the war. Belgium also believed that the defence organisation of the members of the Alliance, and particularly

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of the smaller members, must be based on military integration. These had been the guiding principles of her foreign policy and explained why she was anxious that the Alliance should not be deprived of any of its strength.

M. de BROGLIE wished to make a brief preliminary comment in reply to the friendly welcome extended to him. France was committed, and very deeply committed, to the construction of a common industrial and agricultural market, which was of the utmost importance to her and, in her view, constituted the keystone of an effective Europe. The French representative was very pleased that his first words to the Council were an expression of the hope that the United Kingdom would one day join in this undertaking and a declaration that her accession, or rapprochement, to a real economic community was greatly desired by the French Government. Nobody would expect this meeting to discuss the Alliance, concerning which the French authorities had several times over the last few years said both publicly and privately that it no longer corresponded to reality in a world which they believed had changed fundamentally since 1949 - any more than it corresponded to the real facts of 1956. The French Government were fully aware of the very real measure of interlocking which existed between W.E.U. and NATO. They had already expressed a sincere wish for bilateral and possibly multilateral discussions on both subjects with the Powers concerned, on the basis of documents circulated. In conclusion, M. de Broglie simply wished to add that France's intention, indeed, her determination, to modify the Atlantic Treaty Organisation was equalled by her determination not to jeopardise the Alliance at the expiry of the Treaty signed in Washington in 1949.

The CHAIRMAN observed that all delegations had expressed their views on this subject which would certainly be further discussed in NATO. All members of the Council had been greatly interested by the French representative's statement.

He then invited the Council to discuss the first item on the agenda for political consultations.

1. East-West ...

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