

Extract from minutes of the 69th meeting of the WEU Council (19 December 1956)


Caption: Meeting on 19 December 1956, the Council of Western European Union (WEU) discusses the future of the organisation. The British representative Lord Hood comments Selwyn Lloyd’s statement on a master plan for an international complex that would comprise three elements: strategic and political direction, economic and financial questions and parliamentary questions. Although Selwyn Lloyd suggests that political consultations be held to discuss his ‘grand design’, French Ambassador Jean Chauvel believes that the WEU Council should stick to their existing programme of work, which is focused on the more limited European problem. He also expresses doubts as to minister Selwyn Lloyd’s idea for a single parliamentary assembly.

Source: Council of the Western European Union. Extract from the minutes of the 69th meeting of WEU Council, 19th December 1956. III Future of WEU (doc CR(56)34 I 2). CR(56)35. pp. 1; 5-8. Archives nationales de Luxembourg (ANLux). <http://www.anlux.lu>. Western European Union Archives. Secretariat-General/Council’s Archives. 1954-1987. Relations with non-member. countries and international organisations. Year: 1962, 01/12/1955-30/06/1962. File 350.00. Volume 1/2.

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CR(56) 35

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EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF 69th MEETING

OF W.E.U. COUNCIL HELD ON 19 Dec. 1956

III: FUTURE OF W.E.U.
(CR (56) 34, I, 2)

The CHAIRMAN ^{U. Goffin} said that the Secretariat-General would shortly distribute a résumé of the proposals concerning the future of W.E.U. put forward during the meeting of Ministers on 10th December 1956. Governments would then be able to comment and submit their own suggestions.

He went on to say that he had proposed the inclusion of this item in the agenda so that the Council could be given further details of the proposal on the activities of W.E.U. within N.A.T.O. submitted by Mr. Selwyn Lloyd to the N.A.T.O. Council of Ministers (which immediately followed the meeting of the Council of W.E.U.). This proposal had aroused considerable interest in Paris and in the whole French press.

The CHAIRMAN asked Lord Hood whether he could add anything to Mr. Selwyn Lloyd's statement.

Lord HOOD said he would first like to make it clear that Mr. Selwyn Lloyd's intention had been to describe the main features of a very general idea and not to submit any definite plan.

His Minister's idea was that since the war international co-operation had undergone very considerable and rapid development, as a result of which a large number of international organisations had been set up. This had inevitably been done in a somewhat haphazard way, in response to particular needs and problems, as and when they arose. The absence of a general plan for these organisations had created confusion in the public mind as to what they did and a feeling of uncertainty among the members of their staffs and those who took part in their work as to the future reserved for them.

Mr. Selwyn Lloyd felt that this situation was likely to become more serious in view of new schemes now under consideration, including, in particular, the Brussels Conference, the proposals put forward by the Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs at the meeting of the Council of Ministers and the free trade area scheme. All these would require new machinery to put them into effect. The United Kingdom Minister therefore considered that a master plan should be evolved for the whole international complex. This would comprise three elements:

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CR (56) 35

1) Strategic and political direction, which would be the responsibility of the North Atlantic Council, within which the Council of W.E.U. would form a nucleus. The Minister shared the view expressed by M. Martino; he felt that a useful purpose could be served by discussions, in the first instance, between the Seven countries, on foreign and defence policy, in order to reach a common view.

2) Economic and financial questions: the Minister considered that O.E.E.C. should be the framework for the development of economic co-operation. This in no way implied a wish to dissolve other organisations or to fuse them with O.E.E.C. It simply implied that they should be brought under the aegis of O.E.E.C. in order to co-ordinate inter-governmental economic co-operation. This process had already started in the case of such technical organisations as the Conference of Ministers of Transport, the E.P.U. and the European Productivity Agency which were serviced by the Secretariat of O.E.E.C. The process could be extended: for example, the other European countries could be associated with the Messina plan within the framework of O.E.E.C.; and if the European free trade area came into being, the necessary machinery could be provided by the same organisation.

3) Parliamentary questions: Mr. Selwyn Lloyd took the view that there was some confusion of thought concerning the future of international parliamentary institutions. It was difficult to see in what direction they could be developed. His opinion was that there should be only one international Parliamentary assembly composed of representatives of all the countries belonging to the various international organisations, both European and Atlantic. In practice the composition of this Assembly would of course vary according to the questions discussed, but it would in principle be a single entity, serviced by a single machine and would develop the practice of discussing all problems of international concern in one place, thus avoiding overlapping of competence. Lord HOOD stressed that in his Minister's view such an institution could grow from any one of the many existing bodies; it was in any case a very far-off possibility.

Lord HOOD concluded by repeating that he had summarised the broad outlines of what at that stage was only a very general idea and in no sense a specific project.

M. CHAUVEL thanked Lord Hood for his valuable statement. He wished to point out however that the proposals of the United Kingdom Minister concerned not only European but also Atlantic institutions, since they took in N.A.T.O. The Council of W.E.U. were at present interested in the more limited European problem of the future of the Organisation. He drew attention to the clear programme of work laid down by the Ministers (cf. CR (56) 34. I, 2.) for examining the proposals put forward at their meeting and suggested that the Council should concentrate on that programme, without, however, losing sight of the larger issue.

Dr. SAHM enquired whether it was the intention of the British delegation to submit these proposals to W.E.U. for preliminary examination, in accordance with the views expressed by Ministers at their recent meeting, or to lay them straight before N.A.T.O.

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CR (56) 35

Lord HOOD said that there were at present no definite plans for further action on these general ideas which he recalled were in no sense specific proposals. He agreed with M. Chauvel that they covered a wider field than the present work of the Council. But all Governments agreed that W.E.U. should be used for political consultations and if it were so wished the ideas put forward by Mr. Selwyn Lloyd could be discussed by the Council in due course.

Mr. STIKKER thanked Lord Hood for his statement. There seemed to be general agreement that the complex of international organisations must be simplified. However, this would raise a large number of complicated problems, of which he instanced examples: firstly, could intergovernmental organisations be combined with supranational ones? Secondly, was it in the real interest of organisations such as N.A.T.O. and O.E.E.C. to have a Parliamentary assembly? The Netherlands representative recalled that only a limited part of the information held by these organisations could be passed on to an assembly and that the inevitable refusal to communicate more might well harm the organisations concerned. Thirdly, it could be foreseen that certain countries such as Sweden and Switzerland would be unwilling to be members of a single assembly.

Mr. STIKKER thought that Governments should examine very carefully the "grand design" outlined by Mr. Selwyn Lloyd, before it was discussed at international level. He therefore agreed with M. Chauvel that the Council's immediate concern should be to concentrate on the programme of work approved by the Ministers.

Mr. DUMONT asked Lord Hood for further clarification of the idea of W.E.U. as a nucleus within N.A.T.O. Might this not lead to a reproach by other members of N.A.T.O. that the Seven formed a "bloc"?

Lord HOOD recognised that if the views of the other member States of N.A.T.O. were to be met in their most extreme form, W.E.U. should be dissolved. But his Government considered that the maintenance of W.E.U. was in fact in the interests of N.A.T.O. It would indeed be necessary to consider what useful purpose could be served by W.E.U. and, in particular, how it could best serve the broad interests of N.A.T.O.

Lord Hood agreed with earlier speakers that the Council should address themselves to the immediate programme laid down in Paris. Later on, however, if Governments were to give consideration to the general idea put forward by his Minister, it would undoubtedly be most suitable for it to be discussed by the Council of W.E.U. within the framework of political consultations and any agreement reached there would be most helpful for the long term objective of seeking a solution to the problem of the multiplication of international organisations.

Referring to the point raised by M. Dumont, the CHAIRMAN recalled that the report of the "Three Wise Men" was categorical concerning the value of consultations within a

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CR (56) 35

narrower framework than that of N.A.T.O. (para. 40).

M. CHAUVEL recognised the value of the discussions proposed by Lord Hood, but felt that the Council should concentrate on the immediate task in hand. Like Mr. Stikker he foresaw that Mr. Selwyn Lloyd's "grand design" might raise many difficult problems, particularly the idea of a single Parliamentary assembly. He therefore urged that work on the programme laid down in the minutes of the Ministers' meeting be started forthwith.

M. CHAMPENOIS considered that this exchange of views had been most useful. He drew attention to certain divergencies between M. Martino's proposals and Mr. Selwyn Lloyd's "grand design"; the aim of the former was to give more authority and prestige to the W.E.U. Assembly, whereas the latter proposed the fusion of the Assembly with a larger body. He agreed with M. Chauvel that the Council should keep closely to their terms of reference. Mr. Selwyn Lloyd's proposals could be considered later.

With regard to the programme of work, Lord HOOD said that it would be most useful if Governments could have the fullest possible documentation concerning the various studies carried out under the auspices of the Ad Hoc Assembly.

Mr. STIKKER recalled that a special group of experts had studied the question of direct election to an Assembly without reaching any positive conclusion. Records of their discussions would also be useful.

- The COUNCIL decided to proceed as quickly as possible with the programme laid down in document CR (65) 34, I, 2 and requested the Secretariat to supply delegations with the fullest possible documentation concerning studies carried out under the auspices of the Ad Hoc Assembly.

The CHAIRMAN then referred to M. Pineau's proposal at the meeting of Ministers to the effect that W.E.U. should be used "as the framework for associating the United Kingdom more closely with the work of the Six Powers, particularly as regards the Common Market and EURATOM". This proposal had been endorsed by M. Spaak (CR (56) 34, I, 2). The Chairman asked whether it was the intention that the conversations due to take place between M. Spaak and the United Kingdom Government, when the Belgian Foreign Minister visited London early in January to explain in detail the stage reached by the Brussels Conference and to obtain the views of the British Government, would take place within the framework of W.E.U.

M. CHAMPENOIS said that he could only give a personal view on this subject; he did not think that M. Spaak intended at this stage to place the conversations with the United Kingdom Government under the aegis of W.E.U., mainly for practical reasons. These conversations would take the form of a preliminary contact to explain the stage so far reached

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CR (56) 35

and would be largely technical; in addition, the time at M. Spaak's disposal would be very short.

M. CHAMPENOIS thought that his Minister's intention was rather that the association of the United Kingdom with the Six Powers should be brought within the framework of W.E.U. at a later stage.

M. CHAUVEL, also speaking personally, thought that M. Pineau's proposal did not imply any constitutional change in W.E.U. as did that of M. Martino. It was rather a draft directive giving further guidance within the framework of existing activities.

Lord HOOD wondered whether there were not two ideas in M. Pineau's proposal; firstly, a procedural suggestion which he could accept, to the effect that W.E.U. should be used as a forum for discussions on the association of the United Kingdom with the Six Powers. Secondly, there was the idea that W.E.U. should be used as the actual framework for this association; this proposal would seem to be of concern to other countries which might also wish to take part in the free trade area and he had some doubts on this point. He foresaw rather that if any difficulties arose over the proposed association, the Council might be used as the vehicle for their discussion and solution.

M. CHAUVEL suggested that it might be useful if M. Spaak could meet the Council informally for a short time during his visit to London to give them a general progress report. Other representatives agreed that, providing time allowed, they would greatly appreciate meeting M. Spaak.

M. CHAMPENOIS undertook to convey the views expressed to M. Spaak.

The CHAIRMAN then asked whether the Six Powers and the United Kingdom could agree that the W.E.U. Secretariat might be asked to send observers to the forthcoming London discussions. He raised this point because it appeared that the association of W.E.U. with the earlier work of the Brussels Conference could have been arranged if a move in this direction had been made in good time.

Mr. STIKKER said that he knew that the Netherlands Government were giving very careful consideration to the question of the association of the United Kingdom with the Six Powers and thought that it would be better to wait until a decision of principle had been reached on M. Pineau's proposal before any step such as that suggested by the Chairman were taken.

- The COUNCIL agreed with this view.

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