

## Extract from minutes of the 524th meeting of the WEU Council held at ministerial level (Strasbourg, 26 April 1977)

**Caption:** At the 524th meeting of the Council of Western European Union (WEU), held at ministerial level on 26 April 1977 in Strasbourg and chaired by French State Secretary for Foreign Affairs Pierre-Christian Taittinger, the delegations discuss the development of East–West relations. British Minister of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Frank Ashcroft Judd assesses the development of British relations with the Soviet Union and the other countries in Eastern Europe and reviews the various actions taken by his Government since the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in 1973. Concerning the application of the final agreement of the conference, the French and British Governments emphasise the need to implement all the provisions in the Helsinki Final Act, maintaining constant pressure on the countries of Eastern Europe, particularly with regard to compliance with the humanitarian provisions. Moreover, the French representative affirms that détente should not be limited to Europe but that it should also extend to all other continents, particularly to Africa.

**Source:** Council of the Western European Union. Extract from minutes of 524th meeting of WEU Council held at ministerial level on 26th April 1977 in Strasbourg. II. East-West Relations. CR (77) 7. pp. 13-18; 23-25. 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: 1975, 01/02/1975-30/12/1982. File 132.15. Volume 5/7.

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EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF 524<sup>th</sup> MEETING  
OF W.E.U. COUNCIL HELD ON AT MINISTERIAL  
LEVEL ON 26<sup>th</sup> APRIL 1977 AT STRASBOURG

FILE NO.

CR (77) 7

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M. Pierre-Christian TAITTINGER, Secretary of State to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the French Republic, was in the Chair.

## II. EAST-WEST RELATIONS

Dr. HAMM-BRÜCHER opened the discussion of East-West relations with a survey of the general situation, which she said had undeniably been suffering difficulties since October 1975.

In the Soviet Union's foreign policy, questions of ideology were seen to be restraining the pragmatic approach. Hand in hand with this there was a hardening of internal policies. Since the last meeting of the Warsaw Pact's consultative body at the end of March and beginning of April, there seemed to have been a decision by all countries in the Pact on taking a harder line towards dissidents. In Southern Africa, the Soviet Union had increased its commitment to radical change by contributing to further destabilisation in an area of vital interest to the West, thus deliberately putting a strain on relations with the West. The West, for its part, had been making the matter of human rights a central feature of the East-West argument, and, by so doing, had probably been touching on more basic aspects and structures of the internal edifice of power, and the system of Soviet hegemony, than it had itself at first thought. This policy, which the German Government had itself helped to evolve, offered the advantage of showing everyone concerned that not all the political trumps were held in one hand, and that western society had not lost its attractions and was as strong as ever.

What was needed now was to get things back on a more even keel. There was much to suggest that the East were involved in a series of decisions that would affect the future of East-West relations; this included a final decision on the attitude to be taken at the Belgrade follow-up meetings - either totally low profile (though this would hardly be possible), or aggressive and polemic (which would hamper the process of détente), or sober and constructive. The latter attitude would be taken by the West, and was what they hoped to find on the other side.

Also included was the future relationship between the European Communities and COMECON, where the East had to decide whether to acknowledge the Community institutions and the area of competence of the Rome Treaties. For the same reasons, the matter of further negotiations on fishing agreements between the European Communities and the countries of eastern Europe came into this category too.

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Mr. JUDD remarked that in the two years since the Wilson/Callaghan visit to the Soviet Union opened a new phase in Anglo-Soviet relations, these relations had developed steadily and the range of contacts between the two countries had broadened considerably.

The summit meeting in Moscow in 1975 had been followed by a visit by the Soviet Foreign Minister, Mr. Gromyko, to the United Kingdom in March 1976. Mr. Brezhnev and Mr. Kosygin had accepted in principle an invitation to visit Britain, but dates had not yet been fixed.

Differences of opinion between Britain and the Soviet Union inevitably came to a head from time to time. Some of these related to very important issues, such as, for example, the future of southern Africa or disarmament and levels of Soviet defence spending. Both Governments had made it clear that, in their interpretation, the pursuit of détente did not entail a slackening in the conflict of ideas. However, within the constraints imposed by differences in ideology and national interest, it was believed that the United Kingdom and the U.S.S.R. had built a safer and more productive relationship over the last two years. While a degree of fluctuation in a relationship was obviously inevitable, and upsets were always liable to occur, for example, as a consequence of internal policies, it was hoped there was no reason why Anglo-Soviet relations should not continue to develop constructively, given goodwill on both sides.

A high point in relations with Poland had been the visit to London in December 1976 of the Chairman of the Polish Council of Ministers. The visit marked an important step forward in the development of closer political and other ties with the Poles. It reflected the fact that Britain's relations with Poland continued to be fuller than with any of the other orthodox countries of eastern Europe. Regular exchanges at ministerial level had continued in 1977; for example, the Polish Minister of Science, Technology and Higher Education had visited Britain, and Lord Goronwy-Roberts, Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, visited Poland from 11th-14th April.

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A fairly broad range of contacts had been maintained with Hungary, on a regular basis. During the past four months, detailed discussions had taken place in Budapest with the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, regarding implementation of the C.S.C.E. Final Act, on the bilateral plane.

The visit by the Hungarian Foreign Minister to London at the beginning of March, the first such visit for eleven years, had given an impetus to the further development of political contacts. In addition, during the past year, the Minister for the Arts in Britain, Lord Donaldson, visited Hungary in May 1976, and one of Hungary's five Deputy Prime Ministers visited London in July 1976 to discuss the development of economic co-operation between the two countries.

By the close of 1976, Anglo-Czechoslovak relations had improved satisfactorily in line with the general improvement in relations with the eastern European countries over the last three years. The visit of the Czechoslovak Minister for Foreign Affairs to London in September had symbolised the recovery of relations between the two countries to a more normal level after the trough which had undoubtedly followed the events of 1968.

However, the Czechoslovak Government's reaction to the publication at the beginning of this year of the Human Rights Manifesto, Charter 77, and the concern which this had aroused in the United Kingdom, had irrefutably cast a political shadow over the further development of good relations. The failure of the Czechoslovak authorities to make substantial progress in resolving outstanding personal cases, involving for the most part divided families, also threatened to slow the pace of the improvement in relations. In the coming months, the British Government would need to continue to take into account public attitudes towards events in Czechoslovakia, but the Government remained committed to seeking to develop, insofar as this was possible, relations with that country.

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Anglo-Romanian relations remained cordial. Some half-dozen Romanian Ministers, including the Ministers for Foreign Trade and for National Defence, had paid visits to Britain in 1976. The Lord Chancellor and Lord Goronwy-Roberts had, in turn, been to Romania. The earthquake on 4th March might already be affecting the growth of bilateral trade, which had registered a slight increase in value during 1976. In the past few months, the Romanians had settled the majority of marriage cases involving British subjects, but they continued to adopt a very restrictive attitude towards travel to Britain by Romanian citizens for personal or professional reasons, including prospective Romanian visitors under the cultural exchange programme.

Relations with Bulgaria remained reasonably good, though perhaps somewhat lacking in substance. Visits to Bulgaria by Mr. Hattersley, as Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, and by Mr. Mulley, as Secretary of State for Education and Science, in 1976, were expected to be returned later this year. Cultural relations continued to develop, although, on the Bulgarian side, they remained firmly under Government control. The Bulgarians had settled most of the very small number of personal cases involving British subjects during the past year.

Mr. Judd wished to lay emphasis on the United Kingdom's relations with Yugoslavia, which were considered good. The Secretary of State for Trade and the late Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary had paid extremely successful visits to that country in September and November of 1976 respectively, and the Defence Secretary had just returned from a visit there from 10th to 13th April. At the invitation of the Labour Party, the Secretary of the League of Communists came to the United Kingdom for a visit from 3rd to 6th April. Lord Donaldson, Minister for the Arts, was hoping to visit Yugoslavia in May, and there were also some high-level defence visits in sight. The British Government saw advantage in maintaining and developing Yugoslavia's links with the West, wherever possible,

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and considered that it had been useful to keep in close touch with the Yugoslavs on such issues as world economic problems and disarmament - issues where they could obviously exercise an influence for moderation among the non-aligned.

As to the German Democratic Republic, bilateral relations between the United Kingdom and the G.D.R. had developed in step with those of their allies. Though somewhat cool, relations could be described as correct and business-like. There had been a number of ministerial visits. The G.D.R. Foreign Minister, Herr Fischer, had paid a one-day working visit to London, on 6th September, 1976, which was regarded on the British side as having put relations with the G.D.R. on the same footing as those with other eastern European states. The visit to East Berlin and the G.D.R. by the Trade Secretary, Mr. Dell, on 3rd and 4th February, had been a landmark as the first by a British Cabinet Minister. Lord Goronwy-Roberts had also paid an active and successful visit to East Berlin and the G.D.R. this month. The United Kingdom - G.D.R. Consular Convention, signed on 4th May, 1976, had been ratified during Herr Fischer's visit and an agreement in the field of medicine and public health had been signed during Lord Goronwy-Roberts' visit. Therefore, the United Kingdom now had a useful framework of practical agreements with the G.D.R.

The situation regarding Albania had not really changed. Ministers had said in the House of Commons that, for their part, the United Kingdom Government would be glad if the long-standing obstacles to the resumption of diplomatic relations could be overcome, but there did not seem to have been any positive response.

Turning briefly to the C.S.C.E., which of course was receiving a great deal of attention within the context of the Nine, as of now, the British Government, in bilateral dealings with the Soviet Union and the countries of eastern Europe, had placed great emphasis on the need for the implementation of all the provisions of the Final Act.

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The Russians and their allies had taken some steps in this field, but the scope of their action had been very limited, particularly where the freer movement of people and the free exchange of information were concerned. It seemed important that western countries should maintain quiet, but persistent, pressure on the East, particularly as regards fulfilment of the humanitarian provisions contained in the third "basket" of the Final Act.

M. RADI said that, despite set-backs and the uncertainties which had hung over the dialogue on détente during the last few months in particular, the Italian Government had continued to direct its efforts to that objective. Quite apart from the slower pace of the second half of 1976, which Moscow had attributed to the elections in the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany, the Soviet Union's wait-and-see approach to the changeover in the White House, its reaction to President Carter's attitude on the subject of human rights and, most recently, its rejection of the United States proposals on strategic arms limitation, had unquestionably affected the progress of détente.

In this context, Italy's contribution to the normalisation of East-West relations could be summarised as follows. In January, the Foreign Minister, M. Arnaldo Forlani, had paid an official visit to Moscow. During conversations with Mr. Gromyko and Mr. Brezhnev, bilateral relations had been reviewed with particular reference to economic and industrial co-operation between the two countries; in the field of international politics, the two sides had stated their views on the major aspects of East-West relations. M. Radi stressed that the visit had taken place in a relaxed and cordial atmosphere, and that the Russians had made no attacks on the West, even on particularly delicate subjects of international policy. Political consultations at various levels had continued between the two Foreign Ministers, with experts discussing the main international topics of the day, in accordance with the procedure laid down in the Protocol on consultations, signed in Moscow in October 1972.

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It had to be recognised that there was at present a measure of uncertainty surrounding several problems connected with détente; this had been plain from the introductory survey the Council had heard. It seemed possible that some of these uncertainties might be removed by next September. M. Taittinger was thinking here especially of the Belgrade meeting; as this came nearer, the approach which the various parties intended to adopt should become clearer. There was also the other important factor of Soviet-American relations; the trend here would become plainer as the new American administration gradually took shape and after the first contacts made with Moscow during the past month. Lastly, there were important political meetings between East and West that were to take place during the months ahead.

M. Taittinger wanted simply to stress that, for France, détente was still a vital element in establishing international relations on the desired footing and one which his Government continued to regard as an essential plank of French foreign policy.

In the French view, the policy of détente called for a constant, persevering effort to improve relations between the countries of eastern and western Europe; it ruled out any idea of conquest or ideological confrontation between the two blocs and, what was important, any policy based on spheres of interest or zones of influence. Genuine détente should, on the contrary, mean the initiation of a dialogue between all states based on independence and sovereign equality; it should mean the elimination of any kind of pressures and constraints brought to bear on a country to limit the right of its people to self-determination; and it should imply the absence of any interference in the internal affairs of states from whatever quarter and on whatever pretext. Détente could not, moreover,

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be limited to an improvement of the political climate in Europe, which had been the tilting-ground for rivalries for many years; it must extend to all the other continents as well, and, in the present context, to Africa in particular.

Détente was not, of course, solely a matter for governments and states; it had to do with people, too. As the French Government had said on various occasions, and would continue to say, respect for the liberties and rights that sprang from the dignity of the human being was just as important as respect for the principles which must govern relations between states. So, without wishing to criticise governments publicly in individual cases, the French Government thought it right and necessary to point out that full application of the terms of the Final Act of Helsinki and, in particular, those concerned with humanitarian issues, formed one of the basic elements of détente. Here, the French Government thought it deplorable that individuals, or groups of people, should be prosecuted or harassed because they supported the Final Act and called for its application in their own country.

The Final Act of Helsinki was a yardstick for gauging the progress of détente. The French Government would be taking part in the conference at Belgrade in a frank and constructive spirit, critical in approach without indulging in polemics, so that an account could be drawn up of what had been achieved in the two years since Helsinki. The study must cover the Final Act in its entirety, and not be limited to one or other of the "baskets", or to individual points from the various "baskets". In the French Government's view, it ought to be made clear to the public at large in the West that an assessment in Belgrade, without polemics or complacency, of the application of all the provisions of the Final Act was regarded as important, because this was seen as

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a way of promoting real progress in East-West relations, and, most of all, of helping détente to take root. This was what was required, not propaganda attacks on the domestic situation in one country or another. It was progress in applying all the equally-important principles, and the implementation of all the provisions of the Final Act, which would open the way towards détente, and allow relations between both states and peoples to improve and become what they should be.

There being no further comments from delegations, the CHAIRMAN remarked that the very thorough introductory survey and other speeches on East-West relations had thrown light on the action being taken by each of the member governments, and on the special features of their relations with the countries of the East.

This was an important subject, to which W.E.U. had long been devoting the interest it deserved. It was one on which they would naturally need to exchange their views and comments both before and after the Belgrade Conference. Everyone was well aware that East-West relations, and the problem of détente, were question marks hanging over the very future of Europe.