

Extract from minutes of the 386th meeting of the WEU Council held at ministerial level (Brussels, 9–10 January 1970)

Caption: At the 386th meeting of the Council of Western European Union (WEU), held at ministerial level on 9 and 10 January 1970 in Brussels, the delegations discuss East–West relations. The British Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Michael Stewart, welcomes the attempts made by the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) to improve its relations with Eastern Europe. He also notes that in recent months the Soviet Union has adopted a more moderate style towards the West, but he doubts that there have been any real changes in the main objectives of Soviet foreign policy. With regard to the proposal by the member countries of the Warsaw Pact to organise a conference on European security, the British Government is in agreement with the line taken by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), which does not simply accept the proposal at face value but does not refute it entirely. The British also believe that the unilateral attempts to resolve problems with the Soviet Union have not been advantageous and that NATO should remain the appropriate forum, at least in the first instance.

Source: Council of the Western European Union. Extract from minutes of 386th meeting of WEU Council held at ministerial level on 9th and 10th January 1970 in Brussels. II. Political Consultation. CR (70) 1. Part I. pp. [s.p.]; 15-17. 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: 1966, 01/03/1966-30/11/1970. File 132.15. Volume 2/7.

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EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF 386th MEETING
OF W.E.U. COUNCIL HELD AT MINISTERIAL LEVEL
ON 9th & 10th JANUARY 1970 IN BRUSSELS
[France absent]

Chairman : M. P. HARMEL. *Minister for Foreign Affairs.*

II POLITICAL CONSULTATION

2. East-West relations

Thanking the Chairman for his welcome, Mr. SCHEEL said he was glad to be associated with the work of the Council. He apologised for his late arrival which was due to the special circumstance that the German Foreign Ministry was celebrating its 100th anniversary that day.

Turning to the question of East-West relations, Mr. Scheel remarked that, of all the members of W.E.U., his Government were certainly at present engaged in the most concrete negotiations and discussions with the East European countries. He would confine his remarks to European problems which concerned the seven member countries, and Germany in particular. They were essentially as follows: the Conference on European Security, negotiations between Germany and the U.S.S.R. on the renunciation of force, Germany's relations with Poland and the other East European countries, and relations between the two parts of Germany.

Since March 1969, the Conference on European Security had been the subject of more and more conversations between East and West, and of exchanges of views between western countries in the various organisations of which Germany was a member. In NATO, exchanges of ideas and information between the Allies had produced useful conclusions, particularly regarding the slightly different ideas held by the members of the Warsaw Pact regarding a European security system. At the same time, the Allied governments had been able to clarify their own aims and their attitude towards such a conference. All governments were aware of the need to improve European security, which was perhaps still focussed unduly on the military concept of a deterrent. It was therefore in the interests of the West to welcome the idea of conversations on European security and to make use of every opportunity which might be offered. Any means of

SECRET

SECRET

- 15 -

W.E.U. SECRET

CR (70) 1

PART I

Mr. STEWART felt it very fitting that the Federal Republic of Germany should open the discussion on this item because that country, more than any other, was engaged in the extremely difficult task of direct negotiation with communist countries. His Government welcomed the German decision to pursue this policy and trusted that, difficult as this was bound to be, it would bring dividends not only to Germany but to them all. They must all watch the progress of these talks as one of the important indications of any real possibility of a lessening of tension between East and West as a whole. It was not easy to be dogmatic about this. Soviet policy toward the West in the middle of the previous year had seemed at that time to be static and immobile. Russia had been preoccupied with the World Communist Conference, with the problems of Czechoslovakia, and with her difficulties with China. But by October of 1969 some change had been apparent; by then, talks between the Soviet Union and China had begun in Peking and although it seemed, from recent reports, that very little had come of these talks, they had at least removed some of the heat. More important perhaps were the discussions going on between the Soviet Union and the United States; there were also, as they had just heard, the conversations between the Soviet Union and the Federal Republic of Germany, and the declaration made at Prague by the Warsaw Pact countries. All these, he believed, indicated a more moderate style on the part of the Russians in the way they talked to the West, and about the problems of Europe. It was not so certain, however, whether there was any real change in substance as well as style, and this doubt arose particularly when one looked at the proposal from the Warsaw Pact countries for a conference on European security. Accepting it as it stood would mean, firstly, enhancing the status of East Germany. Secondly, it would, by implication, be accepting the "Brezhnev doctrine" of the right of the Soviet Union to deal with its smaller allies as it saw fit; further, the conference would have, and was possibly intended to have, the effect of distracting attention from what was happening in western Europe, and from the possibilities of enlarging the European Economic Community.

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W.E.U. SECRET

SECRET

SECRET

- 16 -

W.E.U. SECRET

CR (70) 1

PART I

At the same time, one must recognise that there had been some successes for Soviet foreign policy. The rest of the world had not, of course, excused or condoned the occupation of Czechoslovakia, but it had been painfully apparent as the months went by that they could not do much more than continue to disapprove of it; inevitably, as other issues arose, it had ceased to be the source of burning indignation that it was when the invasion actually occurred. They must also notice - and would be considering under another item of the present agenda - the expansion of Soviet influence in the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and indeed in the Indian Ocean. This situation, where there seemed to be a growing Soviet influence, a more moderate style of approach, but uncertainty as to any real change of intention, posed a considerable problem for the West - a problem both of realities and of presentation. He had said deliberately all through that one could not be dogmatic on the question of how much real change there might be in the Russian attitude. This was exactly what Germany now, and all of them in time, had to find out. The communiqué which the NATO powers issued at Brussels was the right approach to this; on the one hand, they did not simply accept the proposal for the conference on European security at its face value, nor did they return a blank negative. There seemed to be some evidence that this NATO declaration was being carefully examined by the Soviet Union and her allies. And if, as he thought they were bound to, they suspected and disliked the proposal for a conference on European security as it stood, they were obliged to consider how, if not in this way, the West did suggest that tension should be relaxed. They must avoid a situation in which it could be commonly believed throughout Europe that the Soviet Union had put forward a proposal for relaxing tension and the West had had nothing to say in reply. That was why Britain had been particularly anxious at the NATO meeting that that Organisation should make a speedy study of the modalities of reducing tension. His Government would be putting forward their views on this in the NATO context, and would welcome an exchange of views with their colleagues on the subject.

/He strongly agreed ...

W.E.U. SECRET

SECRET

SECRET

- 17 -

W.E.U. SECRET

CR (70) 1

PART I

He strongly agreed with Mr. Scheel that they must work together in this. All experience showed that attempts by one nation in the West, imagining it could solve all its own problems vis-à-vis the Soviet Union without consultation with its neighbours, brought advantage to nobody. The West as a whole must pursue - and, strictly speaking, NATO, in the first instance at any rate, was the forum in which to pursue it - the question of what considered and effective reply they could make to the proposals so far coming from the Soviet Union. If they could find the right answer to that, he would not despair of success. At best they would get a relaxation of tension with great advantages all round; at worst they would have demonstrated to the world that if there were no détente the blame for this could not be laid at the door of the democratic countries of western Europe.

Mr. LUNS had also noted with great interest Mr. Scheel's very penetrating and complete account of German policy towards eastern Europe. While listening to his German and British colleagues, the Netherlands Minister had again been impressed by the great utility of the meetings of Western European Union. He agreed to a very large extent with the views of the German and British Governments, and found it very hard to believe that any country, especially a western country, could have even the slightest doubts on the complete bona fide of the German Government in these matters.

The Netherlands Government, for their part, had come away from the recent NATO ministerial meeting in Brussels firmly convinced of the usefulness of their discussions on East-West relations. Furthermore, the communiqué and the joint declaration had clearly set out the common western position with regard to the question of how a fundamental improvement of East-West relations could be brought about. The proposal for a European security conference had been thoroughly discussed at this meeting, and governments had adopted a realistic and positive attitude. The Netherlands Government had made

/it clear that they ...

W.E.U. SECRET

SECRET