

## Extract from minutes of the 302nd meeting of the WEU Council held at ministerial level (Paris, 29–30 September 1966)

**Caption:** At the 302nd meeting of the Council of Western European Union (WEU), held at ministerial level on 29 and 30 September 1966 in Paris and chaired by French State Secretary for Foreign Affairs Jean de Broglie, the delegations discuss East–West relations, particularly the efforts made by their governments to develop bilateral relations with the countries of Eastern Europe. British representative George Thomson raises the question of a possible withdrawal of British troops stationed in Germany because of the costs involved in maintaining them there, but assures those present that these forces would continue to be available to NATO. Concerning relations with the countries of Eastern Europe, George Thomson and Jean de Broglie have identified new prospects and a number of signs that might be a guide to future developments.

**Source:** Council of the Western European Union. Extract from minutes of 302th meeting of WEU Council held at ministerial level in Paris on 29 and 30 September 1966. II. Political Consultation. CR (66) 19. Part I. pp. [s.p.]; 25-30. 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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FILE No :

EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF 302 MEETING

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OF W.E.U. COUNCIL HELD ~~AT~~ MINISTERIAL LEVEL  
IN PARIS ON 29 & 30 SEPTEMBER 1966

Chairman: M.J. de BROGLIE, Secrétaire d'Etat

## II. POLITICAL CONSULTATION

### 1. East-West relations

Mr. LAHR said that the facts of the German problem had not changed radically since the previous meeting of Ministers. The German Government and their allies remained convinced that peace and security would not be ensured in Europe until the German people could exercise their right to self-determination and restore unity within a liberal, democratic State which could maintain good relations with its Eastern and Western neighbours. The Soviet Government was still systematically

following its policy based on the partition of Germany, despite the dispute with China and despite its interest in stabilising relations with the Western powers. It should never be overlooked that the concept of peaceful co-existence did not mean the same to everyone; while the Eastern interpretation accepted the temporary abandonment of war as a political instrument, it did not include the idea of co-existence as understood by the West, that is, no intervention by some States in the affairs of others and no attempt by one side to influence the course of events in the other. The U.S.S.R. first wished to legalise the partition of Germany and thus strike a decisive blow at the cohesion of the Western Alliance. Next, she wished to neutralise and "communise" more of Europe. Having learned from events in 1961 and 1962 (Berlin and Cuba), Moscow was seeking to divide the Western powers on the German problem, to split Berlin from the Federal Republic of Germany, by progressively forcing the Berlin Senate and population towards separate negotiations with the occupied zone and the Eastern countries including the U.S.S.R., and finally, to slander Germany by making her appear as an inveterate war-monger. Without taking any military risks or making direct threats, the Moscow Government was thus maintaining tension in Europe, was trying to discourage the German people and, as it were, to weary the Allies of the whole German problem. Their aim in so doing was to prepare the way for a German confederation which would certainly not produce the reunification desired by the German people, but would bring Germany into the Soviet zone of influence by unifying her under the aegis of communism. The German Government believed that even if the Russians were at present making no direct threats, their policy was none-the-less dangerous; their aims were the same as ever, and only their methods had changed. Their policy was still dynamic, and aimed at a much wider objective beyond the status quo. Pankow was following the Soviet line on German policy and had to adapt its methods as Russian ideas changed. The leaders of the occupied zone unquestionably wanted a stronger Soviet policy. Having failed in his efforts to win international status for the occupied zone and to isolate Berlin from Germany, Ulbricht was constantly forced to probe Western policy on the subject for weaknesses, and to try and persuade Moscow to take firmer action. The German Government had the impression that Ulbricht was being held back by Moscow. This fact, together with the psychological instability of the occupied

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Finally, if progress had been achieved on the first two points, the time would be regarded as ripe for tackling the third - that of political issues. These could not be dissociated from the first two, as Mr. Lahr had already pointed out, and it was for that very reason that M. Harmel had impressed upon the Poles that they should form part of wider international negotiations even though they only occupied the third place on the agenda of bilateral talks. The main problem was, of course, that of German reunification, and here the position of the Western nations had not changed. The Warsaw conversations had not revealed any objection to the problem being placed on the agenda of future conferences, but at the proper time and in a favourable atmosphere created by a certain number of partial agreements on issues covered by the two other heads. It was a fact that the stand adopted by the Polish Government during these conversations had not varied either; they were not opposed to reunification, but they were obviously very anxious that the Oder-Neisse Line should remain unchanged. As for reunification, they did not exclude the possibility of some degree of progress.

Such was the point of view of one of the governments with whom contacts had been made. It did not, of course, imply an identity of views between all members of the Warsaw Pact, but one of the advantages to be drawn from this comparative exchange within the Council of W.E.U. was that it enabled delegations to reinforce, and in some cases to correct, their respective impressions and information. In conclusion, M. Harmel announced that conversations would be taking place between himself and the Hungarian Minister for Foreign Affairs, either in Brussels or Budapest, and that he would be reporting on the results at a future meeting of the Council.

Mr. THOMSON said that he had been very interested to hear the first-hand accounts from his colleagues of their visits or talks with leading members of the governments of the East European countries. Although there had been no contacts of the kind involving British Ministers since the last meeting of the Council, he himself hoped to go to Budapest in a few weeks' time for talks with the Hungarian Government.

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He would like, meanwhile, to comment on certain general issues. In the British Government's view, new prospects were opening up for the development of East-West relations. He himself derived this feeling for the most part from the changes taking place in the East European countries themselves and, in particular, from the new economic measures being carried out there. These changes were bound to have important consequences for the social and political life in that part of the world and ultimately must influence their view of their relationship with the West. Mr. Thomson agreed, however, with what had been said by Mr. Lahr and implied in the speeches of his other colleagues, namely that there was at present little sign of any new radical thinking about international problems on the part of the Soviet Union. He agreed also with Mr. Lahr that the present Soviet leaders recognised that it was no longer in their interest to make use of European issues to create tension, and that their policy was still a very cautious one. There were no signs of important changes to be seen and this was, of course, particularly true in relation to the question of the central problem of the reunification of Germany. Mr. Thomson did not think that the Russians were ready for any sort of constructive discussion on this subject and he therefore counselled that the immediate aim of the West should be to create the kind of climate which would be more favourable to the solution of the larger problems. It was in this context that the British Government, for their part, had been stepping up the tempo of their exchanges with all the East European countries and also with the Soviet Union in the technical, scientific, cultural and political fields. The role of Germany in this process was, of course, particularly important. The meeting that had taken place that week in NATO to discuss East-West relations had reflected a general view that relations with the East European countries were best conducted at present on a bilateral basis. The British Government agreed with this and also with the view that dealings on a NATO-Warsaw Pact basis were unlikely to be profitable. The association of East European countries with international bodies, as suggested in the NATO study, would be welcomed even though membership of some of them, like the International Monetary Fund and the International Bank must, of course, be regarded as a long way off. Great changes would have to take place in East European countries and there would be no sense in sacrificing the interests of present members of these international organisations simply in order to bring the communists in. Both in the Economic Commission for Europe and in the Council of Europe, however, some advance might be made in this direction. NATO was an indispensable forum for exchanging information and experiences, as was W.E.U. itself.

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With regard to the recent British initiative -- the draft Declaration on Europe, which was a statement of principles or a code of behaviour -- the British Government had already raised this in the North Atlantic Council and wished to distinguish clearly between their suggestion and another that had been put forward, namely that there should be a NATO statement of principles put out by NATO unilaterally. Such a statement, it seemed, would have to cover all the main issues of importance to NATO, including in specific terms the views of all members on the nature of a European settlement, its relationship to European security, and so on. There was, therefore, no question of saying or doing anything that cast any doubt on the established position of any NATO member. The British Government had serious doubts about a full NATO statement at this time, especially one addressed to the East. This would inevitably be regarded simply as a retort to the Bucharest Declaration of the Warsaw Pact countries and would lead to further counter-statements which were unlikely to promote any détente at this stage. The draft Declaration, which had been circulated in NATO, set out in broad terms what would be needed if the prosperity, security and stability of Europe were to be assured. It did not, however, deal specifically with the problem of a European settlement, or with particular measures of arms control, for this would have been unacceptable to members of the Warsaw Pact; and it was an essential part of the idea that NATO members, members of the Warsaw Pact and European countries not belonging to either of the two Alliances might feel able to subscribe. The text would thus be modest in its ambitions; but if agreement could be found, the achievement would be considerable and constitute a useful contribution towards a relaxation of tension. Even if there were no difficulties for some delegations concerning the text of any declaration, it was nevertheless understandable that concern might arise about the difficulties of finding a procedure for seeking agreement with the East Europeans and other European countries. It would obviously have to be very carefully thought out, but it could be done without danger to the common interests. In the next few weeks the United Kingdom Government would be putting forward a revised draft of their Declaration to the NATO Council with some more detailed ideas about procedure, and they would hope to have the active support of W.E.U. member Governments.

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To conclude, Mr. Thomson wished to say a word about foreign exchange costs of British troops in Germany. The British Government was in no doubt at all about the concern felt by their allies at the possibility of a withdrawal of some British forces from Germany, and they still hoped that it would not be necessary to take this step. But, for the reasons that were explained in the statement made by the British representative at the Permanent Council of NATO and the W.E.U. Council on 19th August, it was essential to cover the foreign exchange cost of maintaining British forces in Germany, if the current economic difficulties were to be overcome. Although nothing useful could be added on this subject at the moment, Mr. Thomson repeated the assurance that if any forces were withdrawn from Germany they would continue to be available to NATO by being earmarked for assignment to SACEUR. It was now necessary to await the outcome of the ministerial meeting in Bonn on 13th October. In taking their decisions in the light of this meeting the British Government would naturally pay full regard to the views of all members of the Alliance.

The CHAIRMAN said that the French Government had also been pursuing their policy of establishing contacts with East European Governments and had drawn a number of conclusions very similar to those just described. First, the French Government had strengthened or continued contacts with the Government of the Soviet Union, in the wake, as it were, of General de Gaulle's visit. It was quite obvious that a specific policy for the relaxation of tension with the East European countries could not be continued for very long or carried very far without including the Soviet Union and treating her in the same way as the other countries whatever the difficulties might be. Since the last meeting of the Council, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, M. Couve de Murville, who had visited Rumania, Bulgaria and Poland, had continued the policy of making contacts in Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Yugoslavia. This meant that all the East European countries had now been reached by France's efforts to reduce tension and to establish a rather different atmosphere. These, and the

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moves just described, now gave a general picture of the situation, from which some sort of objective balance could be struck.

In the Balkans, apart from Albania, there appeared to be a general improvement. The joint efforts appeared to have been clearly and generally successful in Rumania, and it seemed very likely that this shift in Rumanian policy had led the Bulgarian Government to adopt a somewhat similar attitude. The French Government also hoped for further developments when a Bulgarian delegation visited Paris in the near future. Countries like Greece and Turkey could already be grateful for this policy from which they derived very definite benefits. With all the countries forming the southern part of the Warsaw Treaty area, there was therefore a new atmosphere in sharp contrast with the previous situation. This emergence of differences, the weakening of the bloc concept in the countries concerned and their nationalist tendencies were obvious to all, as was the fact that they now had to deal with economic problems and adopt a much more realistic attitude in dealing with them. The very violence of events in China had also probably cured these countries of a certain complex and had enabled them to support certain revisionist ideas which they would unquestionably not have dared to defend a few months ago. In this general picture, Yugoslavia occupied a rather special and possibly less well-defined position, but she had specific problems and there were grounds for believing that she had not lost all hope of helping to bring about a relaxation of tension.

As regards the Warsaw Treaty countries further to the north, there was undoubtedly a very different atmosphere today. As already stated, there was unquestionably some tension over problems concerning the Federal Republic of Germany, but there were nevertheless some signs which might be a guide to future developments. Every contact with Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia had given the impression that the need to examine certain problems over a fairly long period was recognised, that a

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certains concept of advancing by stages was becoming common, and that a more realistic attitude to the German problem was beginning to gain ground. When General de Gaulle visited Moscow this problem had indeed been raised with some frankness for the first time, and in the joint declaration signed at the end of the conversations the Soviet Government had abandoned some of the standard phraseology used on this question. As a somewhat new development, it recognised the existence of a German question and there had since been some easing of anti-German propaganda in the Soviet press. In fact, one article in Pravda referred specifically to the existence of a German national problem. No doubt these were only small signs, because in the matter of European problems, the Soviet Union was proving intractable and was trying to raise the international status of the "Democratic Republic". Nevertheless, one gained the impression that the Russians did not wish to continue the present situation indefinitely, and the first signs of fresh developments might now be emerging. In any case, the policy of easing tension between the small nations of Eastern Europe and the Western countries would gather momentum as an atmosphere was established, obliging the Soviet Union to reassess the position. In conclusion, the French Government thought it important to try and further the relaxation of tension and to maintain parallel co-ordinated action by the Western countries.

Mr. LAHR thanked the Italian and Belgian Foreign Ministers for the stand they had taken on the German question during their visits; his Government had also had occasion to thank the President of the French Republic for the position he had taken up in Moscow. He was glad that the present discussion had enabled the situation to be thoroughly reviewed. Certain aspects of the matter were of course subject to varied interpretations, but these differences of approach were useful insofar as they indicated potential means of improving East-West relations on every suitable occasion. Mr. Lahr had, however, noted a certain degree of caution on the part of all delegations in their assessment of such relations. Although

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