

Extract from minutes of the 446th meeting of the WEU Council held at ministerial level (Rome, 11 September 1972)

Caption: At the 446th meeting of the Council of Western European Union (WEU), held at ministerial level on 11 September 1972 in Rome, the delegations discuss East–West relations, and particularly bilateral contacts with the countries of Eastern Europe. The French Foreign Minister, Maurice Schumann, and the British Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, particularly raise the question of Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions in Central Europe (MBFR), the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and the Soviet attitude to Vietnam and the Middle East. On the matter of Germany, Sir Alec Douglas-Home states that the United States, France and the United Kingdom have agreed to reaffirm their rights and responsibilities for the country as a whole. He also affirms that the Western Allies will continue to defend their position in the face of efforts from the Eastern bloc to enhance the status of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in international organisations.

Source: Council of the Western European Union. Extract from minutes of 446th meeting of WEU Council held at ministerial level on 11th September 1972 in Rome. II. Political Consultation. CR (72) 14. pp. 1; 13-18; 29. 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: 1971, 01/02/1971-30/03/1974. File 132.15. Volume 4/7.

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EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF 446[#] MEETING
OF W.E.U. COUNCIL HELD ON AT MINISTERIAL
LEVEL ON 11th SEPTEMBER 1972 IN ROME

FILE No.
CR (72) 14

Chairman: M. G. Medici, Italian Minister
for Foreign Affairs

II. POLITICAL CONSULTATION

1. East-West relations

a) Bilateral contacts with eastern countries

M. HARMEL said that, in the course of the last few weeks, he had visited Sofia from 3rd to 6th July and had then had talks with Mr. Gromyko during his stay in Belgium from 9th to 12th July, after which senior Belgian officials had been in Bucharest from 28th July to 3rd August and, finally, he himself visited Helsinki at the beginning of September to discuss East-West relations.

Throughout these conversations, the same aspects of relations between the East and the West had, of course, been discussed, in anticipation of the

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M. SCHUMANN said there were four points worth noting from the conversations he had had in Paris with Mr. Gromyko, only a few days after Sir Alec Douglas-Home, Mr. Rogers and he had met the Soviet Minister in Berlin, on the occasion of the signing of the final Protocol on 2nd June.

The first concerned the need to bring the German States into the United Nations Organisation without further delay. Although not surprised by Mr. Gromyko's remarks, which repeated what he had said in Berlin, M. Schumann had been struck by the emphasis laid on the outdated nature of the concept of one Germany and by the care his Soviet colleague had taken to explain that, in the circumstances, he did not consider it necessary to reaffirm the rights and responsibilities of the four powers.

It was true that, since then, there had been signs that the Soviet Union's position had become somewhat more flexible. It was obvious that, whenever the West referred to the right of the German people to self-determination, the Soviet representatives made reservations and even raised certain objections. M. Schumann repeated that subsequent developments nevertheless permitted a somewhat more optimistic view.

Regarding the second point, namely, balanced force reductions, everyone knew that the French Government had a clearly-defined attitude. They had denounced what they believed to be the trap set by such a move at a time when the Russians had been hostile to the idea. Obviously, they were not inclined to change their mind simply because, one fine day, as France had foreseen, Mr. Breznev had decided that it was time to answer the "signal from Reykjavik". However, the interesting point was that, as M. Harmel had said, the Soviet Minister had confirmed his Government's view that there was no connection between the Security Conference and any negotiations on M.B.F.R. At the same time, it was quite true that he had not denied the possibility of parallel talks on M.B.F.R. and the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, on the clear understanding that the conversations on M.B.F.R. could be held in a

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special forum or referred to the permanent body which, in theory, would be set up by the Conference.

On the third point - Vietnam - M. Schumann had been struck by Mr. Gromyko's moderation. Everyone present was familiar with the French suggestions regarding the need for a settlement which would be both political and military. The Soviet Minister had not contested this view. The positions of the Soviet Union and France on the Vietnam problem were, of course, far from identical but, as M. Schumann repeated, he had been struck by Mr. Gromyko's moderate tone.

On the fourth and last point, the Middle Eastern crisis, Mr. Gromyko had, however, severely criticised the attitude of the United States. Since then, something had happened which he had not perhaps expected and of which he had certainly given no hint, namely the dismissal of the Soviet technicians by the Egyptian Government. But the most recent events, and in particular the previous day's debate at the Security Council, suggested that, verbally at least, the Soviet Union's position had not changed at all.

With regard to the Middle East, M. Schumann expressed great satisfaction that, in the otherwise disappointing debate at the Security Council, Europe had taken a common line. Four W.E.U. countries were at present members of the Security Council and, at every vote, they had taken the same line, after agreeing together in consultations in which the Minister had himself taken part, from Paris. He thanked the governments concerned for the way they had received his suggested amendments. He thought it very encouraging that, in a confrontation between the super-powers and in this sort of collusion between extremes which had driven the discussion to an impasse, Europe had maintained not only a reasonable, but a common attitude.

Finally, the Minister referred briefly to the periodical conversations held with the Yugoslavs, Poles and Romanians. There was nothing of particular note to mention concerning the Yugoslavs or Poles. The Polish Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs had come to Paris from Bonn. There, he had taken part in the exchange

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of instruments of ratification of the Warsaw Treaty and, by and large, the general terms in which he had spoken of the prospects for Polish-German relations appeared satisfactory. The French Government would shortly be receiving Mr. Gierak in Paris and also Mr. Tepavac, the Yugoslav Foreign Minister. In conclusion, M. Schumann mentioned the conversation he had had with Mr. Jacobescu, the Romanian Vice-Minister, who, as the Council were aware, was an important person in his own country, more so than his post might lead one to suppose. At all previous meetings, he had been one of the keenest critics of the Soviet Union's threats to his country's security. This time, he had been much calmer about the development of European affairs and about Soviet-Romanian relations. He had been more concerned to talk about working out his country's relations with the European Economic Community.

M. BEMPORAD (translation from Italian) referred to the discussions that had taken place between M. Manescu, the Foreign Minister of Romania, and M. Medici. M. Manescu - like M. Medici - had expressed pleasure at the excellent relations existing between the two countries, but had asked in particular for Italian support in the Community to speed up and conclude the current negotiations for the extension of generalised preferences to Romania.

During the discussions with the Romanians, arrangements had been made for a visit to Romania by the Italian Foreign Minister, probably in November, and for a return visit by President Ceausescu, on the invitation of the Italian President. All this clearly demonstrated Romania's desire to maintain close relations with Italy, with particular reference to relations between Romania and the European Economic Community.

On the subject of European security, M. Manescu had again raised the question of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe and had laid special emphasis on Romania's views in that respect. Bucharest rejected the idea of a conference intended solely to sanction an agreement between the two military blocs. In fact, M. Manescu had remarked that in such a case, a non-aggression pact between East and West would be sufficient. What Romania wanted was an agreement between the states concerned, regardless of the geographical zones or political groupings to which they belonged, whereby the interested

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states, with equal rights and obligations, and in full sovereignty, would assume the common obligation of renouncing the use of force or the threat of force in their dealings with each other. M. Medici, while supporting this idea, had recalled the realities of the international situation, which could not be ignored. He had therefore emphasised that the Conference must be carefully prepared, if this objective was to be achieved.

M. Manescu had replied that Romania shared the Italian view. The need for careful preparation must however not be used as an excuse for postponing the Conference. Bucharest, in fact, considered the Conference to be a matter of extreme urgency. M. Medici had agreed and had added that, specifically in order to avoid unsatisfactory results from the Conference, it must be established that the views publicly expressed by the various participants were matched by the intention to bring about a genuine reduction of tension in Europe.

With regard to bilateral relations with the Soviet Union, Sir Alec DOUGLAS-HOME recalled the difficulties experienced by the British Government a year previously due to the espionage conducted by the Soviet Union through their Embassy in London, and in particular through their Trade Mission. It had become so notorious that it simply could not be ignored. It was a tiresome business but the United Kingdom Government had to go through with it. Sir Alec's conclusion, after a year, was that it had been a salutary exercise. During this summer the Russians had been anxious apparently to resume normal relations and there had been a noticeable improvement, with relations now being less frosty than for some time.

On other bilateral relations, Sir Alec mentioned that the Vice-President of Romania, the Chief of the General Staff and the Minister for Foreign Trade had recently made successful visits to the United Kingdom, and there had been a corresponding improvement in relations with Poland. Hungary continued to keep its affairs under a low profile. Regarding Yugoslavia, which was of course in a different category, it was very satisfactory that there was going to be a visit next month by the Queen, Prince Philip and Princess Anne to President Tito.

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Referring next to some remarks made about the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, Sir Alec stated that the important thing in the next few months was to get an agreement on an agenda without too much detailed argument. In the British view, what happened after the Conference was more important than what happened before it, and provided an agenda was arrived at which made it possible to raise all the questions which western Europe wanted to raise, this would be sufficient. Sir Alec believed that, at the outset, the Russians had looked upon the Conference as a possible chance to prevent the appearance of the expanded European Community. They had given up this idea long ago. Now he had no doubt that one of their objectives at the Conference would be to try, in an atmosphere of détente, to reduce the will of the western European countries to protect their interests, and to make the necessary sacrifices to do so. But he thought the western countries had had enough warning not to fall for that. He considered that they, certainly the United Kingdom, were not in the least afraid of the Conference being staged. What western Europe had been able to do for its people was so incomparably better than anything the communists had achieved, and this was being illustrated daily, that they ought to be able to come out of such a Conference with flying colours.

As to how they should proceed after the Conference, Sir Alec had an open mind. Nevertheless, in order to follow up any items which could be identified as being worth pursuing, in terms of the common interest between West and East, he would prefer ad hoc machinery to some form of permanent machinery. To this extent, he had rather changed his mind as he now believed that ad hoc machinery was probably better to start with.

As for M.B.F.R.s, the more the British Government looked at this problem the less they liked it in terms of western security. Nevertheless, they would have to face up to the fact that a conference on this subject probably would take place, and they only hoped that it did not result in anything weakening the military position of the West.

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M. Schumann had raised the question of the Middle East, and mentioned the debate in the Security Council. Sir Alec too thought it was a happy augury that the western European countries had been able to speak with one voice in that forum the previous day, and to vote accordingly. It was, however, much more difficult of course to devise proper methods of controlling this kind of tendency to anarchy which was becoming so much a feature of the modern world. In this connection, Sir Alec understood that the German Foreign Minister, Mr. Scheel, would have some comments to make the following day in a wider forum.

As regards the development of bilateral relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and the USSR, Mr. von BRAUN (translation from German) reported that over recent months the Federal Government had had no talks of any importance with Mr. Gromyko; the last conversation with the Soviet Minister had been in June, and the W.E.U. Ministers had already been informed of this.

On the whole it could be said that the German-Soviet agreement and the agreement on Berlin had marked a favourable start to the process of normalisation between the Federal Republic and the Soviet Union. The Federal Government hoped that when this process was completed, its relations with the Soviet Union would be comparable to those of the other members of W.E.U. with that country.

On this basis, the Federal Government was planning to intensify co-operation with the U.S.S.R. in various technical and political fields. They were not surprised to find, however, that there were still all kinds of psychological, political, practical and technical obstacles. Thanks to the agreement on Berlin, it had been easier to include the city of Berlin in various other agreements and treaties which were either already concluded or planned between the Federal Republic and the Soviet Union. This being so, some of these agreements could be worked out step by step. The Federal Government had signed a trade agreement on 5th July and three others -

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Sir Alec DOUGLAS-HOME was grateful to Mr. von Braun for bringing the Council up to date on the Federal Republic's efforts to achieve a general relations treaty. The British Government, with, of course, their French and United States allies, were involved in these efforts because it had been agreed that it was desirable that these three Governments should re-affirm their rights and responsibilities for Germany as a whole. They had made this point jointly and separately to Mr. Gromyko and, so far as he knew, the Soviet Union had not replied. On the question of western solidarity, the western countries had preserved their position pretty well during 1972 in the face of eastern efforts to enhance the status of the G.D.R. in international organisations. The United Kingdom Government for their part would continue this policy of close co-operation.

Mr. SCHMELZER supported Sir Alec's remarks, despite the fact that there was growing pressure from certain political circles in the Netherlands to come to a quick recognition of the G.D.R. Like the British Government, the Netherlands would continue to support the Federal Republic on this issue.

M. HARMEL said that his Government's view was the same as that expressed by Mr. Schmelzer. It might perhaps be added that Finland's explanations were somewhat embarrassed; she did not find it easy to explain, especially with regard to the problem of the aftermath of the war, how she was negotiating initially with one side, without ensuring a measure of parallelism with any conclusions which might be drawn from such discussions if they were entered into from both sides. Having listened to Mr. von Braun that afternoon, and Mr. Kaleinen a week before, M. Harmel was well aware that there was a great discrepancy between what Finland would like to be able to adopt as a position or as an explanation of her attitude, and the position outlined by Mr. von Braun and understood by his colleagues.

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