

Extract from minutes of the 166th meeting of the WEU Council (Brussels, 17 November 1960)

Caption: This extract from the minutes of the ministerial meeting of the Council of Western European Union (WEU) held in Brussels on 17 November 1960 sets out various questions concerning the debate on relations between the Council and the Assembly in the area of defence. The members of the Council share the view that the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) should not be asked to change its security regulations to provide classified information to the Defence Committee. They approve the idea of developing close unofficial contacts between the Secretariats of WEU and NATO and emphasise the need to make better use of national information sources. French representative Jean Chauvel affirms that the replies given by the WEU Council should always have a collegiate character as difficulties would arise if each minister were to present a national viewpoint. It is also important to improve the drafting of the Assembly's questions and Recommendations and to communicate them sufficiently in advance for the Council to be able to provide adequate replies. British minister Edward Heath points out an anomaly, namely that the NATO Parliamentarians' Conference has sometimes received information which has been refused to members of the WEU Assembly. The Assembly's proposals concerning the representation of the Council at joint meetings are therefore not accepted.

Source: Council of the Western European Union. Extract from minutes of the 166th meeting of WEU Council held on 17 November 1960 in Brussels. II. Relations between the Council and the Assembly. Defence Questions. CR(60)25. pp. 8-11. Archives nationales de Luxembourg (ANLux). <http://www.anlux.lu>. Western European Union Archives. Secretariat-General/Council's Archives. 1954-1987. Organs of the Western European Union. Year: 1960, 01/01/1960-30/08/1961. File 202.414.05. Volume 1/1.

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EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF 166 MEETING of Ministers
OF W.E.U. COUNCIL HELD ON 17 Nov. 60. Brussels

III. Relations between the Council & the Assembly

I. Defence Questions

M. WIGNY recalled that relations between the Defence Committee of the Assembly and the Council were recognised by both sides as suffering from certain weaknesses, which concerned principally:

1. the information furnished by NATO in order to assist the Council in replying to questions put by the Defence Committee;
2. the representation of the Council at joint meetings with this Committee.

So far as point 1 was concerned, three solutions were possible:

- a) NATO to be asked to operate its security regulations in a more liberal way.

From the ensuing exchange of views it emerged that the Ministers were opposed to any suggestion being made to NATO that their security regulations be modified in order to give the Assembly Committee members classified information.

In support of this view, Mr. von BRENTANO in particular referred to the recent case in his country of a parliamentarian who had proved unworthy of trust; the Federal Government intended as a result to limit to a strict minimum the provision of information on defence matters to parliamentarians where the divulgence of such information could cause prejudice; they felt the same should hold good for the W.E.U. parliamentarians.

M. SCHAUS pointed out that no classified information was given to parliamentarians in his country. He also felt that security regulations should be tightened in this field.

However, the point was made by Mr. HEATH and several other speakers that the NATO Parliamentarians' Conference received on occasions information which was refused to W.E.U. parliamentarians. This certainly was an anomaly.

In addition, as pointed out by Mr. LUNS, it did happen that the contents of documents which remained classified in NATO were widely known outside, even in the press; NATO might be asked not to refuse such information to the W.E.U. Assembly.

/b) Closer ...

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- b) Closer unofficial contacts to be developed between the Secretariats of W.E.U. and NATO with a view to ensuring that the Council's replies were drafted in a way which would reduce to a minimum the difficulties mentioned above.

The Ministers were unanimously in favour of this proposal.

In this connection, M. CHAUVEL pointed out that it was not only a question of improving the Council's replies. It was essential to try to ensure that the Assembly's questions and Recommendations were better drafted and, above all, that they were communicated sufficiently in advance of joint meetings for the Council to have time to produce adequate replies.

- c) The Council to make the maximum use of sources of information in member countries so that NATO was only approached as a last resort.

Opinions were divided on this point.

It was felt that this practice might prove dangerous, in that it could lead to NATO being by-passed. There was in addition the difficulty that more information might be furnished on certain occasions than on others without any apparent reason.

On the other hand, the desirability of furnishing the parliamentarians with the information they could legitimately expect to receive was again emphasised; furthermore, a good many of the Committee's questions were in reality of such a nature that replies could well be prepared from national sources. In any case, such information should only be given under the collegiate responsibility of the Council.

Summing up, the CHAIRMAN noted that the Council:

- a) did not approve any request to NATO to modify their security regulations in order to supply the W.E.U. parliamentarians with classified information;

they agreed however that NATO be requested to treat W.E.U. parliamentarians on the same footing in respect of the supply of information as the NATO Parliamentarians' Conference, and be requested in addition not to invoke security considerations concerning information which had already been widely divulged;

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- b) approved the development of closer unofficial contacts between the Secretariats of W.E.U. and NATO with a view to ensuring that to both questions and recommendations replies were as satisfactory as possible;
- c) agreed to better use being made of national sources of information, provided they were given under Council responsibility.

On point 2, representation of the Council at Joint Meetings, the following proposals had been made by the Assembly:

- a) that a more active part be taken by the NATO observers present.
- b) participation at joint meetings of member countries Ambassadors to the North Atlantic Council.

All speakers were unanimous in rejecting these two proposals, for the reasons given in document C (60) 159.

- c) Joint meetings between the Committee and the seven Defence Ministers.

M. CHAUVEL stressed that the replies given by the Council to the Assembly must always have a collegiate character: if seven Defence Ministers were to answer the Committee's questions at joint meetings, this might be jeopardised.

Other speakers shared this view, drawing attention to the difficulties which would arise were each Minister to present a national viewpoint.

- d) The participation at joint meetings of a national Defence Minister.

During discussion of this proposal, the following points were made:

(i) it was recalled that the Committee had been received at different times by nearly all the Defence Ministers, who had not only addressed them, but answered their questions. There might be certain advantages in a national Defence Minister being present at joint meetings, as proposed.

/(ii) On the ...

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(ii) On the other hand, the Minister for Foreign Affairs presiding the meeting would be placed in a difficult position; he would be presenting the collegiate view of the Council whereas his defence colleague was not necessarily bound to do so; the latter would be able to speak much more freely, and present a national viewpoint. Such a situation would undoubtedly give rise to complications.

(iii) The questions to which the Council could reply adequately were usually those concerning the defence policy of the Alliance as a whole; it being obvious that the Committee was chiefly interested in the political aspects of defence, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of a member country would be in a position to reply.

Mr. HEATH stated that, subject to certain conditions, the United Kingdom view had not been unfavourable to this proposal. However, he had been much impressed by the arguments advanced above, and was prepared to agree to its rejection.

Mr. LUNS wondered whether it might not be possible to go some way towards meeting the Assembly's wishes in the following way: the Minister presiding might be accompanied by an official of appropriate rank and competence who, at the invitation of the Minister, could reply on certain technical points, or assist the Minister in his replies.

Other Ministers thought that the presence of such an expert, which might provoke the parliamentarians to put additional questions, would make it even more difficult to avoid replying on certain points. Furthermore, the difficulty over the need to give a collegiate view would arise here also. It was recalled in particular that there was nothing to prevent the Minister from consulting his national experts before the meeting or from being assisted by such officials as he deems necessary.

Summing up, the CHAIRMAN noted that the Council could not see their way to accept the proposals of the Assembly concerning the representation of the Council at joint meetings.

The Council in London was requested to reply to the Assembly in this sense.