

Extract from minutes of the 110th meeting of the WEU Council held at ministerial level (Rome, 5 March 1958)

Caption: The minutes of the 110th meeting of the Council of Western European Union (WEU) at ministerial level, held in Rome on 5 March 1958, focus on the debates on cooperation in arms research, development and production. British representative Selwyn Lloyd believes that multilateral consultations on the subject are possible but that most countries are limited by programmes that have already been adopted. In order to establish a definite production programme, the United Kingdom thinks that consultations should begin on a bilateral basis. The British Government has therefore begun discussions with Germany, France and the Netherlands and will shortly hold talks with Italy. The United Kingdom is keen to conclude other bilateral agreements with the Member States of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and WEU and to keep its WEU partners informed. The end product of this cooperation should be made available to all the members of WEU and NATO. Finally, Selwyn Lloyd refers to a statement made in the House of Commons by the Minister for Supply to the effect that the United Kingdom is seeking to cooperate not only with the Americans but also with the countries of Europe, which share similar industrial and strategic problems. The German representative, Heinrich von Brentano, believes that difficulties particularly arise when attempts are made to solve problems by pursuing several separate lines and that it would be useful for the chairmen of the steering committees set up by the various different arrangements to meet with the members of the Standing Armaments Committee (SAC). He also suggests that the North Atlantic Council should make use of the experience of the SAC. French representative Maurice Faure supports the position of the German representative and confirms that after discussing the matter for so many years, it would be regrettable if the Member States were unable to coordinate their efforts; he believes that success depends on the political determination of the governments to promote effective cooperation. Selwyn Lloyd also agrees with the German proposal and suggests that the North Atlantic Council should refer the matter to NATO before the meeting of the NATO Defence Ministers.

Source: Council of the Western European Union. Extract from minutes of the 108th meeting Ministers of WEU Council held on 5 March 1958. Rome. II. Exchange of views on co-operation in arms research, development and production. CR (58)8. pp. 5-10. Archives nationales de Luxembourg (ANLux). <http://www.anlux.lu>. Western European Union Archives. Secretariat-General/Council's Archives. 1954-1987. Subject dealt with by various WEU ORGANS. Year: 1958, 01/06/1957-30/04/1958. File 442.00. Volume 1/4.

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EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF 110th MEETING Ministers
OF W.E.U. COUNCIL HELD ON 5 MARCH 1958. Rome
CR(58)8

II. EXCHANGE OF VIEWS ON CO-OPERATION IN ARMS RESEARCH,
DEVELOPMENT AND PRODUCTION 442

^{K. Pella}
The CHAIRMAN considered that the discussion about to take place on co-operation in the research, development and production of armaments was of the greatest importance. It was vital in present circumstances to ensure the best possible means of defence for all members of W.E.U.; each was ready to make the maximum contribution to the common interests of the Alliance and, without in any way affecting the 15-nation solidarity of N.A.T.O., discussion of the question between the Seven was bound to have particular significance.

Mr. Selwyn LLOYD considered that all the countries of the Alliance needed the best military equipment available in the right quantities at the right time and at the most economical price. To achieve this, the first step should be to decide the nature of the equipment required. This was a proper subject for multilateral consultation; but most of the countries were already committed for some time (perhaps five years) and development programmes had to be initiated long before they could be expected to bear fruit. Governments were therefore somewhat limited by the programmes already adopted. However, this should not prevent Governments from tackling problems of immediate concern, or from trying to establish, by multilateral discussion, what were the ideal requirements for the more distant future.

/Once a general ...

W.E.U. CONFIDENTIAL

Once a general requirement had been established, the question of a definite production programme arose. The United Kingdom Government thought it best to start discussions here on a bilateral basis because this method seemed the most likely to produce, in relation to particular weapons systems, a solid foundation on which to build. Thus, they had held bilateral talks during the past twelve months with the French and German Governments; Anglo-French and Anglo-German steering committees had been set up, under whose aegis groups of experts were examining technical issues. A similar arrangement had been made recently with the Netherlands Government and conversations were to be held shortly with the Italian Minister of Defence and also with other Governments.

The first difficulty that arose, however, was how to associate other member States of W.E.U. and N.A.T.O. with the work being done under these bilateral arrangements. If collaboration in research and development was approved, a second difficulty arose - how to extend the arrangements to the production field.

Mr. Selwyn Lloyd stressed that his Government was ready to conclude similar bilateral arrangements with any other W.E.U. or N.A.T.O. country; they were also ready to keep their W.E.U. partners informed of progress made.

The problem of advancing from the bilateral to the multilateral concept was basically that of enabling countries to take up a position on what types of equipment under development they intended to adopt as a joint venture. His Government believed that the presentation at the earliest possible moment to other countries, and particularly the smaller ones, of any workable schemes of co-operation which might be devised bilaterally would give them the best opportunity of deciding where they could most usefully make a contribution. The result should be agreement between two or three countries to pool their resources, share their facilities and dovetail their programmes in the development of a new weapon for which there was a generally agreed requirement, with the participation of other countries in the Alliance. This meant that the producing countries must give the largest possible measure of information to other countries on the nature and progress of their discussions.

If it was the general wish that the terms of the Memoranda of Understanding governing co-operation between countries be circulated to the S.A.C. or the Council, the United Kingdom Government would be very pleased for this to be done, provided the other partners agreed. They were also in favour of meetings from time to time between representatives of the bilateral and trilateral steering committees in order to compare progress.

/The British ...

The British Government believed that, in the final stage, the countries taking part in a joint venture should prepare a combined production plan for a particular item, wherever possible bringing in other countries. A good deal of co-operation could be achieved by letting out sub-contracts in the various countries. The end-products should be available to all members of W.E.U. and N.A.T.O.

Finally, Mr. Selwyn Lloyd referred to co-operation with the United States. His Government hoped that this country would be associated with any joint ventures at an early stage, and regarded the plan for association within Europe as complementary to European associations with North America. Implicit in the United Kingdom proposals was a recognition on both sides of the Atlantic that certain fields were appropriate for European co-operation and that this co-operation should be devoted to finding a European solution within the framework of a European production base.

Mr. Selwyn Lloyd recalled in this connection a recent statement by the United Kingdom Minister of Supply in the House of Commons to the effect that "what we are after is not only closer co-operation with the Americans but closer co-operation with the European countries also. I go so far as to say that the scope for co-operation with Western Europe is certainly as great as that with America, particularly since the industrial and strategic problems of Western Europe and ourselves are much more alike."

This was the spirit in which the United Kingdom Government approached the problems under discussion.

Mr. von BRENTANO wished to underline some of Mr. Selwyn Lloyd's remarks: difficulties arose when attempts were made to proceed along several separate lines of approach - whether bilateral, trilateral or multilateral - all aiming at the same objective.

He therefore suggested, firstly, that the Chairmen of the steering committees set up so far under the bilateral and trilateral arrangements should meet with the members of the S.A.C. to evolve a method for co-ordinating the discussions already taking place at different levels.

Secondly, he suggested that some way be found of ensuring permanent contact between the Standing Armaments Committee and N.A.T.O. The members of W.E.U. might take the initiative by proposing in the North Atlantic Council that N.A.T.O. make full use of the services and experience of the S.A.C.

Mr. von Brentano referred to a proposal made by the United Kingdom delegate in the S.A.C. on 16th January 1958 (SAC(58)D111), concerning the methods for broadening the bilateral approach at the appropriate moment. He could accept this proposal.

/Mr. LUNS ...

Mr. LUNS stressed that the lack of progress in the joint production and standardisation of armaments within N.A.T.O. had not been disguised by previous speakers. Developments had been slow in coming and he had therefore listened to the proposals of the United Kingdom and German Ministers with great attention. Mr. Selwyn Lloyd's proposals laid perhaps too much stress on bilateral co-operation. In view of the importance his country attached to a common effort in this sphere, he had heard with great satisfaction the proposals of Mr. von Brentano. That concerning closer collaboration between N.A.T.O. and the S.A.C. should be carefully examined, but Mr. Luns was somewhat doubtful whether it could bring useful results in view of the lack of concrete progress so far in these matters; could not some additional way be found of giving a new impetus to collaboration in these matters by adopting a multilateral approach? For these reasons, whilst welcoming Mr. Selwyn Lloyd's proposals concerning an exchange of information about the bilateral and trilateral arrangements, he hoped it would be possible to go further and therefore warmly supported the suggestion for a committee of the Chairmen of the steering groups.

He would have no objection to the communication to the Council of the Memoranda of Understanding on which the arrangements to which his country was a party were based.

Whilst agreeing with Mr. Selwyn Lloyd's remarks on the difficulties created by advance commitments in the armaments field, Mr. Luns thought they should not prove insuperable where new weapons were concerned.

M. FAURE recalled that the problem of co-operation in this field had been under discussion for over ten years. There had been many declarations of principle, but a real wish for practical implementation had not always been evident. For ten years, nations had tried to maintain their traditional prerogatives, but very few countries in the free world could "go it alone" in matters of national defence under present circumstances. Governments had sought empirical solutions - bilaterally, or even trilaterally - and this was, in fact, the only method being tried at present. But it would be deplorable if, after all these years, member States were to fail to co-ordinate their efforts.

M. Faure stressed most strongly that success depended on the determination of Governments to ensure effective co-operation. Mr. von Brentano's proposals would be an important step in this direction, and he supported them.

He recalled his Government's call for more effective collaboration at the December meeting of the North Atlantic Council; these proposals were now being restated before the Council of W.E.U. M. Faure added that he found it difficult to understand that the member States should refuse each other information which was in any case known to the enemy.

/The French ...

The French Government considered it essential to achieve true co-ordination of the efforts of member countries, so that Europe's contribution to the defence of the West would be worthy of her.

M. LAROCK agreed with his colleagues concerning the need to work out some means of ensuring really effective and practical co-operation. His Government desired that, at the very least, the other partners in the Alliance should be fully informed as early as possible.

Mr. von BRENTANO recalled the large numbers of bodies dealing with this problem and cited a long list which was not even complete. In spite of this evident interest in the matter, no real progress was being made. He agreed that a successful outcome depended on the political determination of Governments to give substance and impetus to such an important task.

The CHAIRMAN, summing up the discussions, said he would also present the views of the Italian Government, who were in agreement with most of the points made by previous speakers.

Firstly, the starting point was clearly the vital necessity for co-operation in the armaments field; in his Government's view, the aim should be to find a truly European solution which would be backed by the United States. Attention had been drawn to the difficulties which arose from advance commitments in armaments production, but ways could surely be found to overcome them.

A problem that had been particularly stressed was that of the extension of bilateral and trilateral arrangements. He recalled that member States had adopted the principle of multilateral co-operation in many fields - political and economic as well as military - and felt sure that none wished to go back on it. However, as had been pointed out, it was difficult to ensure the practical implementation of this principle. It had been hoped that the empirical method of bilateralism would provide a solution, but extension of this method appeared essential. His Government could therefore agree with the proposals put forward by Mr. von Brentano and supported by other speakers.

Concerning the proposal for collaboration between the S.A.C. and N.A.T.O., M. Pella was convinced that W.E.U. could be of material assistance to that Organisation by acting as a focal point for the pooling of practical results of bilateral and trilateral co-operation and putting them at the disposal of N.A.T.O. In this way, the Seven Powers, far from excluding the other partners of the Atlantic Alliance, would offer the benefit of their experience to the Fifteen. He suggested that the proposal should be made in N.A.T.O. in this spirit and the other Ministers agreed.

/Mr. von BRENTANO ...

Mr. von BRENTANO thought that the permanent representatives of the Seven to the North Atlantic Council might be instructed to put the proposal to N.A.T.O.; he suggested that the Italian representative be requested to take the initiative in the matter.

Mr. Selwyn LLOYD concurred, adding that it was most important that this step should be taken in good time before the meeting of the N.A.T.O. Defence Ministers in April. The Council agreed to this suggestion.

After this exchange of views,

The COUNCIL,

with a view to furthering multilateral co-operation in the research, development and production of armaments,

DECIDED:

1. that the Secretary-General would convene a meeting of the Chairmen of the steering committees set up under:
 - : the bilateral and trilateral agreements
 - and the members of the Standing Armaments Committee to exchange information on the work being done and progress made under
 - : these various arrangements;
2. that the member States of W.E.U. would, through their permanent representatives on the North Atlantic Council,
 - : invite N.A.T.O. to make use of the experience and good offices of the S.A.C.
 - : The Italian Government were requested to instruct their permanent representative to initiate action on these lines.

/III. ...

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