

Extract from minutes of the 420th meeting of the WEU Council (26 May 1971)

Caption: The minutes of the 420th meeting of the WEU Council, held on 26 May 1971, outline the debates on the activities of the Standing Armaments Committee (SAC). The Prefect Mr Roux, Secretary-General of the SAC, raises the problem of the Committee's inactivity and calls for the activities of some sub-groups to be transferred to the SAC. He suggests that a group of independent experts should examine this question. French Ambassador Geoffroy de Courcel is particularly struck by the problem of relations between the ad hoc group and the SAC. He notes that, given the complexity of the question, he is currently unable to give a reply on the proposal to set up a group of experts. The British Ambassador Sir Thomas Brimelow and the Netherlands representative emphasise that the problem should be dealt with at ministerial level. The British representative is of the view that preparations for the meeting of 1 July should take differences of opinion into account, without losing sight of the possibility of setting up a committee of experts. Following the explanations given by Mr Roux, Geoffroy de Courcel notes the disadvantage of having armaments problems addressed by representatives that do not hold sufficient delegated powers from their military authorities. He confirms that he will ask his government whether the question of the SAC can be included on the agenda for the meeting of the Council of Ministers, though he is not sure that this will be possible.

Source: Council of the Western European Union. Extract from minutes of the 420th meeting of WEU Council held on 26 May 1971. Rome. I. Report of the activity of the Standing Armaments Committee. CR (71)11. p.1; pp.6-10. 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: 1967, 16/03/1956-30/04/1967. File 250.10. Volume 2/2.

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FINABEL : See pp 7 et seq.

I. REPORT ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE STANDING ARMAMENTS
COMMITTEE

(C (70) 111; C (71) 15 and 78)

Welcoming M. le Préfet Roux, the CHAIRMAN recalled that the activities of the Standing Armaments Committee in 1970 had been described in the half-yearly reports circulated as C (70) 111 and C (71) 15, and noted by the Council on 23rd April, 1970 and 17th February, 1971 respectively. M. Roux had been good enough to supply an advance copy of the comments he wished to make to the Council (C (71) 78) and, after his statement, he would be glad to answer any questions from delegations.

M. ROUX, who had not attended a meeting of the Council for three years, had thought that it might be useful to provide a document summarising the position. In document C (71) 78 he had, therefore, listed the points which could be regarded as satisfactory and had restated the terms of the problem of the Standing Armaments Committee's own activities, recalling the various attempts which had been made to give them a fresh impetus. The International Secretariat did not lack either activities or work, and was kept busy by the Ad Hoc Group and its sub-groups. These had aroused considerable interest from most participating countries and encouraging results had been achieved in some cases. Their activity offered hopes of interesting and valuable developments in their own particular fields.

The real problem was the activity or rather the inactivity of the Standing Armaments Committee itself, which merely took note of the work of the various groups. A possible palliative or temporary solution in this respect might be to transfer the work of some sub-groups to the Standing Armaments Committee and this question which, on the best assumption, could hardly be resolved before the end of the year, would be raised in the Standing Armaments Committee. However, this would clearly not be sufficient to give the S.A.C. a genuine existence and the disease could not be cured until it had been correctly diagnosed. This was why M. Roux had proposed that a group of independent experts should be set up to study the problem as a whole.

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M. de COURCEL thanked M. Roux both for his most interesting report on which he had just commented and for his constant efforts in dealing with these extremely complex problems. When reading the report, the French Ambassador had been particularly struck by the problem of relations between the Ad Hoc Group and the S.A.C. and would welcome further clarification of this point. He was at present unable to give his Government's reply on the proposal to set up an expert group. It was precisely because of the complexity of the problem that his Government wished to give serious thought to the aspects before coming to a decision.

Mr. HUYDECOPER also thanked M. Roux for his statement. The proposal to set up an expert group merited close consideration. He was unable to give an opinion at the moment but, referring to the conversations which had taken place in The Hague at the Council's meeting with the Presidential Committee of the Assembly, he confirmed that his Government would like the whole problem to be examined at ministerial level. He had, therefore, been instructed to propose that this item should be placed on the agenda for the Ministerial Council to be held in London on 1st July. If this proposal was accepted, it would be helpful if the Council devoted part of their work in June to preparing the debate on this subject.

Sir Thomas BRIMLOW wished to associate himself with the proposal made by Mr. Huydecoper. It seemed to him that at their meeting on 1st July Ministers should be made aware of the nature of the problem as stated by M. Roux. There was obviously a difference of opinion and Sir Thomas therefore agreed with the Netherlands delegate that the time before 1st July might be used to prepare the work of the Ministers. He also thanked M. Roux for his contribution which was appreciated.

M. CLASEN endorsed his colleagues' expression of thanks to M. Roux and also supported the proposal of the Netherlands representative.

M. MANZINI in turn thanked M. Roux, who was aware that the Italian military authorities shared the views set out in his report.

Observing that all delegations had expressed their first reaction, the CHAIRMAN invited M. Roux to answer the question put by the French Ambassador concerning the Ad Hoc Group.

/M. ROUX appreciated...

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M. ROUX appreciated that from the outside the present situation might well appear very artificial and pragmatic. It was explained, however, by the fact that in 1955 it had been realised, first, that the military authorities must be associated with work concerning the production of armaments and, secondly, that there was already a body, FINABEL, which comprised representatives of six of the member states of W.E.U. but not of the United Kingdom. Some arrangement therefore had to be worked out whereby the military representatives of the continental countries and the British representative could meet without at the same time bringing FINABEL under the S.A.C. The result had been the formation of an "Ad Hoc Group", which transmitted to the S.A.C. military projects approved by the Six in FINABEL and acceptable to the United Kingdom, in order to arrive at a Seven-power agreement. The Ad Hoc Group had no real official status but it had been operating in practice since 1958 and, to some extent, it alone provided the S.A.C. with work.

With recent developments in relations between the United Kingdom and FINABEL, it became necessary to consider how the S.A.C. would be affected if the United Kingdom joined this military group of the Six. If this did happen there were at least two possibilities; either the Ad Hoc Group would cease to have any reason to exist because FINABEL would include representatives of all seven countries or, preferably, the Secretariat for the new FINABEL would be provided in Paris by the International Secretariat of the S.A.C.

M. Roux added that, as things stood at present, the Ad Hoc Group and FINABEL played a vital role in maintaining the S.A.C. until reforms could be introduced.

M. de COURCEL thanked M. Roux and observed that FINABEL, which had been set up as a pragmatic solution, following the proposed European Defence Community, was working satisfactorily, the link with the United Kingdom being provided through the Ad Hoc Group. He understood therefore how liaison was maintained between FINABEL/Ad Hoc Group, on one side, and the International Secretariat on the other; this was a good arrangement. He would appreciate further explanations on how the work and staffs of FINABEL enlarged by the Ad Hoc Group were linked with those of the S.A.C.

/M. ROUX recalled ...

M. ROUX recalled that the function of FINABEL and the Ad Hoc Group was to define military characteristics and that, in this work, account had to be taken of operational requirements which were a matter for the Chiefs of Staff. They also had to study technical solutions and projects capable of satisfying these characteristics. At that stage : the S.A.C. had no part to play. In theory, it intervened only when agreements having been reached, its members were instructed by their governments to promote collaboration in production (construction of prototypes and organisation of trials and joint or co-ordinated production). The only link between the work of FINABEL/Ad Hoc Group, on the one hand, and the S.A.C. on the other lay in the progress report received by the latter on the work of the former. The S.A.C. was, however, unable to act itself to promote production agreements if the governments continued to prefer to work through any bilateral or trilateral agreements.

Dealing next with the question of the membership of the S.A.C. and of FINABEL/Ad Hoc Group, M. Roux reminded the Council that the S.A.C. was a governmental body, made up of permanent representatives, whereas the Ad Hoc Group was a purely military grouping of representatives of the Army Chiefs of Staff of six countries and of the British Ministry of Defence.

: The members of the S.A.C., except in the case of
: Luxembourg, were members of their national delegations to
: NATO but not the same as the members of FINABEL.

M. de COURCEL stressed the disadvantage of having these armaments problems dealt with, either in W.E.U. or in NATO, by representatives who did not hold sufficient delegated powers from their military authorities. The national general staffs normally had the last word because they fixed budget priorities and used the funds allocated for armaments in each country.

The CHAIRMAN observed that this exchange of views had again revealed the complexity of the problem. His own personal view was that, while the utility of FINABEL could not be denied in the present circumstances, it must be recognised that this purely military body had from its inception placed the S.A.C., which was a governmental body, in a difficult and ambiguous position. It might be doubted, as a spokesman for the British Government had in 1957, whether the best method was to start with a purely military

/study. Would it ...

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study. Would it not be preferable to promote a combined military and civilian study from the outset? While there was a genuine political will to make progress, a number of ambiguous basic issues would have to be cleared up first.

The Chairman then noted that the Netherlands, British and Luxembourg delegations wished to place the question of the future and function of the S.A.C. on the agenda for the ministerial meeting in London. If other delegations could support this proposal, the working group should prepare the ground so that the Ministers could decide on the best approach to the problem.

M. de COURCEL would ask his Government whether they could agree to the question of the S.A.C. being placed on the agenda for the London Council of Ministers. The problem was being studied in Paris and the point to be decided was whether this study could be completed in time for the French Minister to make a useful contribution. The question was practical rather than a matter of principle.

M. FREY would seek instructions from his Government; in the meantime, a point concerning procedure occurred to him. In their preparatory work, would the Permanent Council merely state the problem of the work and future of the S.A.C. or would they try to formulate suggestions so that the Council of Ministers could, if appropriate, give specific terms of reference to the Permanent Council?

Mr. HUYDECOPER said that, for the agenda for the Council of Ministers, he would favour a wording referring to the standardisation of armaments rather than the form of words suggested by the Chairman. As regards M. Frey's question, he could inform the Council that the Netherlands Ministry would shortly be circulating a note which might assist with the preparation of the Ministerial Council.

M. MANZINI was prepared to recommend his Government to approve any formula acceptable to other members of the Council, which would allow of progress in the direction indicated by M. Roux.

/Sir Thomas BRIMBLOW ...

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Sir Thomas BRIMLOW remarked that consideration of the problem of the standardisation of armaments by the Council - which would allow all aspects of the question to be examined - should not lead to M. Roux's proposal for a study of the whole problem by a group of experts being lost from view at either ministerial or permanent representative level.

The CHAIRMAN recalled that the Council already had M. Roux's proposal before them; if the working group prepared the debate, the idea would certainly be mentioned and it was possible, therefore, that the Ministers might instruct the Council to study this proposal by M. Roux among other matters.

M. de COURCEL repeated that he was not sure of obtaining his Government's approval for the inclusion of this item in the agenda for the next Council of Ministers. He also wondered whether the members of the working group would be in a position to discuss the problem usefully. He was afraid that the timetable was already so heavy and the time remaining so short that it would hardly be possible to do anything but take cognizance of the note which the Netherlands intended to transmit to the Council.

The CHAIRMAN summed up the discussion by noting that, while certain governments thought that the problem should be raised at the ministerial meeting in any case, the decision as to its inclusion in the draft agenda could not be taken until later.

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