

Extract from minutes of the 496th meeting of the WEU Council (10 June 1975)

Caption: At the 496th meeting of the Council of Western European Union (WEU), held on 10 June 1975, the permanent representatives continue the discussions that the ministers began on 20 May (CR(75)8) on the activities of the Standing Armaments Committee (SAC) and the problems of arms standardisation in Europe. Sir John Killick notes that, in accordance with the line taken in the Belgian memorandum, British minister John Callaghan has requested that the governments should decide exactly what they want the SAC to do before allocating it new responsibilities. French Ambassador Jacques de Beaumarchais then expresses his government's disappointment at the decision taken by two Member States concerning the replacement of their military aircraft, noting a contradiction between this decision and the Belgian proposals. These events clearly highlight the importance of leaving no stone unturned in developing cooperation in the field of armaments. He reaffirms France's support for the Belgian document, while noting that his government will confirm its position on some points at a later date. Sir John Killick emphasises that the British minister did not think WEU was the appropriate forum for addressing the question of European arms production and purchases, but explains that his government is willing to study the proposals in a positive spirit, not wishing to delay the action taken by the WEU Council. Replying to the French representative on the matter of the replacement of the F104 aircraft, the British representative regrets that it has not been possible to find a European solution but says that it could now be argued that the United States has an obligation to make purchases in Europe. He says that this should be seen as a lesson for the European countries, which should perhaps have developed a European project in anticipation of this replacement. Finally, the French representative expresses his agreement with the Belgian Ambassador's remarks on the importance of political will for achieving a competitive production capacity in Europe, since economic considerations, although important, cannot be the determining factor.

Source: Council of the Western European Union. Extract from minutes of the 496th meeting of WEU Council held on 10 June 1975. III. Examination of the activities of the Standing Armaments Committee and problems of the standardization of Armaments in Europe. CR (75)9. pp. 5-14 Archives nationales de Luxembourg (ANLux). <http://www.anlux.lu>. Western European Union Archives. Secretariat-General/Council's Archives. 1954-1987. Subjects dealt with by various WEU organs. Year: 1976, 01/05/1975-30/06/1976. File 442.00. Volume 4/4.

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III. EXAMINATION OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE STANDING ARMAMENTS
COMMITTEE AND PROBLEMS OF THE STANDARDISATION OF
ARMAMENTS IN EUROPE

(CR (75) 8, III; C (75) 77)

The CHAIRMAN remarked that at the end of the discussion on this subject at the ministerial meeting on 20th May, it had been agreed that the Permanent Council should study the Belgian proposals in detail, as a first step, and then come forward with suggestions.

He recalled that these proposals, which were previously discussed by the permanent representatives, were set out in final form in a memorandum transmitted on 15th May, 1975 to the Ambassadors of the Nine in Brussels; the text of this memorandum had been reproduced and circulated by the Secretariat in the original French version in document C (75) 77 on 23rd May, and in English as a non-official translation in document C (75) 77 (bis) of 9th June.

The other basic document was, of course, the minutes of the ministerial meeting (document CR (75) 8).

The Chairman then asked if delegations had any comments to make regarding these proposals, or any suggestions on how the Council's work might be organised.

Sir John KILLICK reminded delegations that, towards the end of the ministerial discussion, Mr. Callaghan had declared that, as he saw it, the main purpose of the Council's work was to see that before governments embarked on new work or a new study, and gave people new responsibilities, they should know exactly what they intended these people to do, and should ensure that there would be no duplication of work.

This attitude seemed to be consistent with the line taken in the Belgian memorandum. Sir John noted that, on page 7 of the note, on the role of W.E.U., it was said that, if the suggested procedure could be agreed, Belgium would make specific proposals for possible subjects for study. Although governments had not yet actually agreed to this procedure, it would be most valuable, before the matter could be taken further, to have some rather fuller ideas from the originator of the proposal, and more detailed suggestions for terms of reference for the Standing Armaments Committee. These could then be submitted to Ministers as soon as possible for a decision.

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W.E.U. CONFIDENTIAL

CR (75) 9

In connection with this item on the agenda, M. de BEAUMARCHAIS first wished to repeat in this forum the disappointment his Government had felt when two of the Governments represented in this Organisation took the decision, known to all, regarding the replacement of their military aircraft. The French Prime Minister had had occasion to express publicly his regret for Europe following this decision. The Ambassador added that the French Government had carefully considered the proposals put forward by the Belgian Government and could not help noting that, on certain points, there was perhaps some contradiction between the spirit underlying these proposals and the decision which had just been taken.

However, this was past history and, on the French side, it was felt that the events to which the Ambassador had just referred showed even more clearly than before the need for European countries to leave no stone unturned in developing their co-operation in the armaments field. M. de Beaumarchais recalled in this connection that at the last W.E.U. ministerial meeting, M. Destremau had declared the French Government's support for the general ideas contained in the Belgian memorandum. He now confirmed this support, adding that its scope was general and did not cover all the details of the proposal in the Belgian document. The French delegation would be able to state a slightly more detailed view on certain points over the next few weeks; on other points, they would be putting forward their own ideas.

As the problem was being dealt with for the first time since the ministerial meeting and the Session of the W.E.U. Assembly, M. de Beaumarchais had wished to make this preliminary statement to indicate the spirit in which the French Government still wished to study the Belgian Government's proposals, which they regarded as interesting.

/M. ROTHSCHILD first ...

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CR (75) 9

M. ROTHSCHILD first wished to assure his French colleague how well he understood his expression of the disappointment felt regarding the aircraft order recently placed by the Belgian Government. As M. de Beaumarchais was no doubt aware, this had been an extremely difficult, and even an agonising decision for the Belgian Government. The Prime Minister, who had had to deal with the matter himself, had hesitated for months between the two options. Without repeating all the explanations given in this connection, the Ambassador wished to say once again that the Belgian decision had been motivated by major economic considerations. Taking into account all the many elements involved, it had become economically quite impossible to make any other choice. The conditions of all kinds militating in favour of the American aircraft were so manifest that it had been impossible to allow political preferences to override economic requirements. M. Rothschild was mentioning this today because, as M. de Beaumarchais had said, they must think of the future and learn by this experience. He believed most sincerely that an overall armaments policy must be defined and, until this had been done, and agreement had been reached on general objectives in this field, there was inevitably a danger that cases such as this recent one could arise again for any of the countries represented around the table. When there was a marked imbalance between economic and political interests, circumstances unfortunately often obliged governments to prefer economic to political interests, even when they were less enduring. The two kinds of interest must, therefore, be made to coincide. M. Rothschild wished to confirm that the Belgian Government were still very strongly attached to this view. They wished to give vigorous impetus to the proposals they had put forward in recent months, in the hope that they might lead to something specific.

From the practical point of view, the Ambassador had a number of comments to make on the Belgian proposals. He understood that it was difficult for some of the W.E.U. partners to give firm undertakings at once. His wish at this stage was to win sympathetic interest around this table for his Government's proposals. If there were

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W.E.U. CONFIDENTIAL

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CR (75) 9

such support, the Belgian delegation would then be prepared to put forward specific proposals for the first stage of the operation, namely, a detailed survey of the present state of the armaments industries of the seven countries; additionally, the possibility of associating the Republic of Ireland and Denmark with this undertaking could be studied by the Seven; this meant finding out whether these countries would be interested in joining in the project, to what extent, and how this could be done.

In conclusion, M. Rothschild repeated how hard it had been for his Government to take the decision mentioned earlier, which did not indeed look to him a happy one for Europe. However, they must move forward; in the Belgian Government's view, moving forward meant beginning by taking a decision as soon as possible, on the basis of a note to be submitted to the Council, to prepare as complete a picture as possible of the armaments industries in the seven countries, so as to see more clearly and more exactly what measures could be taken to encourage them to collaborate with each other.

Mr. von HASE said how much he appreciated M. de Beaumarchais' remarks about the continued co-operation and solidarity of the French Government in the very important matter of trying to rationalise European armaments and defence procurement.

He also wanted to underline Sir John's comments about the need to have a clear idea how the Council could put the Belgian proposals into effect.

The German Government thought the Council should proceed in this order: first, a study in detail; second, discover the essential nature of the work that could be done in W.E.U.; and, third, make a recommendation to Ministers. At their next meeting, which might be held sometime in the autumn, Ministers could agree to proposals and entrust specific tasks to the Standing Armaments Committee for execution. In this way, some progress could be achieved.

/Sir John KILLICK stressed ...

W.E.U. CONFIDENTIAL

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CR (75) 9

Sir John KILLICK stressed that, while Mr. Callaghan had said at the ministerial meeting that he did not think at this moment that W.E.U. was the most appropriate forum for tackling this problem, the British Government were entirely willing to examine the Belgian proposal in a positive spirit on the basis of a more fully elaborated idea of what the Standing Armaments Committee might do. Attention should also be paid to Mr. Callaghan's point that it was very difficult to separate the defence industries from industrial policy in general, which was a matter, in some part, for the Community machinery in Brussels, and account would need to be taken of this aspect also in considering how possible duplication could be avoided.

Sir John stated that his Government, whose attitude, as he had already made clear, was an entirely positive one, had no wish to delay action being taken by the W.E.U. Council, or to impede progress being made on the Belgian proposals.

As regards the more general question of the replacement of the Fl04, Sir John, who would not presume to speak on behalf of his Government on this point, observed that the latter had had a certain interest in the present discussions in that one possible solution might have involved the Anglo-French Jaguar. Personally, he was quite sure that his Government sympathised very deeply on the one hand with the disappointment felt by the French Government in finding that a European solution was not possible, and, on the other, and to an equal degree, with the Belgian and the other three governments concerned in the very difficult decision that they, and they alone, had to take.

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W.E.U. CONFIDENTIAL

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CR (75) 9

Sir John felt nevertheless that it could now perhaps be argued that the European countries had something 'in the bank' vis-à-vis the United States, in the sense that in pursuing their interest in the "two-way street" which had been pursued in the Eurogroup, they might be able to argue that the United States now had a greater obligation to attempt European purchases. He realised, however, that this was a small consolation.

Declaring that he was not familiar with the whole history of this project, the British representative said that he could fully support the view that this should be a lesson for member states for the future. As regards the history, member governments should possibly have done more in past years to look ahead to the time when the replacement of the F104 was due, and to have done something to evolve a European project which would have met the foreseeable requirements. This would, of course, have required a long time-scale.

The essential thing now was to look forward to such replacement necessities and to make plans in good time so that a valid European candidate was available as a replacement. In that connection, and by way of illustrating his point, Sir John observed, as a personal remark, that a sale in the other direction across the Atlantic had recently, of course, been the ROLAND missile system. Now he assumed that, at some point, there would arise a requirement to replace or improve that weapons system, which the United States had bought. This was the kind of transaction that member states should be thinking about now, in order to have something available for further sales to the United States and, of course, in Europe when that time came.

M. PHILIPPE confirmed the sympathetic interest expressed by M. Thorn at the ministerial meeting regarding the ideas put forward by M. van Elslande. He added that, as the Belgian delegation were in the best position to assess the practical implications of those ideas, he supported the Belgian Ambassador's proposal to submit suggestions in preparation for the first stage of the study to be carried out by the Council.

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W.E.U. CONFIDENTIAL

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CR (75) 9

Referring to M. Battaglia's comments at the ministerial meeting, M. PAOLINI said that Italy supported the spirit of the Belgian proposal from the double standpoint of rationalising and co-ordinating work on armaments, which should take due account of the fact that a number of international organisations were involved.

He could therefore assure the Belgian Ambassador that he could count on the sympathetic interest of the Italian delegation for the proposals put forward by M. van Elslande at the Council of Ministers, and for the Belgian memorandum which gave a very interesting survey of the problem. The same applied to any other material which could be provided for the discussion which the Council would have to hold on terms of reference for the Standing Armaments Committee and on the choice of subjects, on the understanding, of course, that the whole package would have to be submitted to Ministers for approval.

Baron GEVERS remarked, in the first place, that he fully understood the feeling of disappointment voiced by his French colleague about the recent purchase of aircraft. It was well known that this whole matter had led the Netherlands Government also to take a very difficult decision; on the other hand, as his British colleague had said, this should be a lesson for the future.

Recalling that his Minister had remarked at the Council meeting that the need for greater co-operation in the equipment field had always been recognised and was now more than ever at the centre of attention, the Ambassador said that Mr. van der Stoep had sympathy and understanding for the Belgian proposal, which should be elaborated further. He thought that his Minister was thinking, in the first place, of a descriptive study of the defence industries in the member countries, but he could say little more until the Belgian ideas were spelt out in greater detail. Delegations would then have to report back to their governments for instructions.

/The CHAIRMAN noted ...

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CR (75) 9

The CHAIRMAN noted, after this first round of comments, that the Belgian Government's proposals were viewed sympathetically by all delegations. The next question, therefore, was how to proceed with the study which the Council had to carry out. Several delegations had asked the Belgian representative to submit more detailed proposals. In addition, the Council might wish to start considering the proposals in C (75) 77, either immediately or at their next meeting.

M. ROTHSCHILD said that he would be glad to help his colleagues. He felt that the most practical approach would be to avoid going too far into the theoretical debate for the moment. If the Council agreed, he would ask his authorities for a document to be used as a basis for discussing whether, as a first stage of the Belgian proposal, the S.A.C. should be asked, under the supervision of the Council, to draw up a detailed questionnaire for circulation to the seven governments, and possibly also to Denmark and the Republic of Ireland, in order to establish an overall picture of existing industries. There were, no doubt, a number of difficulties, and Sir John Killick had already mentioned one, but why should the attempt not be made? The Ambassador did not believe it was impossible. There would be some hesitation, some replies would be inadequate to begin with, and some would be confused, but the work would be continued to see whether a picture of existing armaments industries in Europe could be established. Ultimately, the situation should be revealed clearly enough. In the light of experience over the last twenty years, M. Rothschild was firmly convinced that the problem of standardising armaments would not be resolved until a community of economic interest was established between the various industries. Quite clearly, over those twenty years, national economic interests had always won the day over intellectual recognition of the need to standardise. Now it had become essential to try and create common economic interests, and for this, governments must press manufacturers to work together. The first step could very usefully be to organise as accurate a survey as possible and, if the Council wished, the Ambassador would ask his authorities to prepare a preliminary draft on this particular point.

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W.E.U. CONFIDENTIAL

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CR (75) 9

Referring to Sir John Killick's comments, M. Rothschild said he believed that W.E.U. was a suitable forum for this work. There was an available institution, the S.A.C. There was no comparable institution bringing together the Nine or the Seven, and the S.A.C. was crying out for work. Why not give it this task? The Ambassador thought it would be inappropriate to ask for any further commitment at this stage. On the other hand, he did not think that any government, however much concerned, as was the Belgian Government, to avoid duplication, would have any serious objection to the suggested enquiry. If it did not succeed, it would at least have been shown that the undertaking was impossible. The Ambassador thought personally that any undertaking of this kind was possible if the political will existed.

M. de BEAUMARCHAIS wished to take up the Belgian Ambassador's last point, when he said that what really mattered was the political will; and if that will were lacking, economic considerations would prevail. On this point, M. de Beaumarchais quoted a passage from the Belgian document: "In many cases, pure economic logic should lead us to consider the possibility of co-production with the United States rather than seek to maintain less efficient competitive production in Europe. The ultimate consequence would be the disappearance of any autonomous capacity from the continent of Europe." Economic considerations were important, therefore, but could not be the determining factor; only the political will could ensure the maintenance of an autonomous European capacity.

The Ambassador also wished to refer briefly to what Sir John Killick had said concerning the Franco-British aircraft, the Jaguar. His colleague was better informed than he was concerning the relatively recent proposals on that subject. M. de Beaumarchais thought he could say that the die had already been cast when the British Government took up this idea again concerning the Jaguar.

The Ambassador's third comment related to the report to be submitted to governments by the Council. The German Ambassador had seemed to suggest that a report should be submitted to Ministers in the autumn. At the ministerial meeting, M. Destremau had also spoken of the autumn, but M. de Beaumarchais had to admit that he was not very clear as to what the Minister had meant. His personal view was that the Ministers did not intend to meet again in a few months' time. In this context, he made the general comment that the permanent representatives constituted the Council

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W.E.U. CONFIDENTIAL

W.E.U. CONFIDENTIAL

CR (75) 9

of W.E.U., with the same powers as the Council meeting at ministerial level. Each representative was, of course, in regular contact with his government, and it therefore seemed unnecessary for the Ministers to meet so that the governments could take a decision on the future course of the work.

Mr. von HASE said that his delegation did not insist in any way on a ministerial meeting, and agreed that the French Ambassador's remarks were well-founded. Nevertheless, he felt that from the psychological point of view, some action by the Ministers to "bless" any decisions taken could sometimes be useful, even if it were not strictly necessary.

M. ROTHSCHILD observed that if a serious study was intended, it would be some months before all replies to the questionnaire came in and a picture of existing industries could be established. He doubted whether this work could be completed before the end of the year. The next step could then be considered.

In reply to the Chairman, M. Rothschild said that the document which his delegation would be submitting to the Council was now being drafted. He thought he would be able to circulate it before the holidays so that the Council could start considering it in September. Of course, if the time for preparation could be shortened, the Council could start their study earlier. The Ambassador hoped to be able to give more details by the end of the week.