

Extract from minutes of the 98th meeting of the WEU Council (30 October 1957)

Caption: The extract from minutes of the 98th meeting of the Council of Western European Union (WEU) on 30 October 1957 describes the tense relationship between the WEU Assembly and the WEU Council and mentions the debates on the idea of a European defence policy. The representatives of the Federal Republic of Germany (Hans von Herwarth and Heinrich von Brentano), France (Jean Chauvel) and the United Kingdom (Sir Anthony Rumbold) contribute to the discussion and propose solutions to improve the relationship between the Assembly and the Council. On the idea of a European defence policy, despite a few differences of opinion regarding various details, the members of the WEU Council believe that such a policy should not be limited to the WEU Member States.

Source: Council of the Western European Union. Extract from minutes of 98th meeting of WEU Council held on 30 october 1957. CR(57) 27. 5 p. 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: 1957, 01/09/1957-31/12/1957. File 202.400.03. Volume 1/1.

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http://www.cvce.eu/obj/extract_from_minutes_of_the_98th_meeting_of_the_weu_council_30_october_1957-en-ca63636c-c164-4ef5-a22f-53f824379c4a.html



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EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF 98 MEETING
OF W.E.U. COUNCIL HELD ON 30 Oct. 57
CR(57)27

III. THIRD SESSION (SECOND PART) OF THE ASSEMBLY

(C (57) 182 and 185)

The CHAIRMAN drew ^{Mr. Jaffar} attention to the texts adopted by the Assembly at their recent session for transmission to the Council (C (57) 185).

His personal impression had been that the Assembly had had a reasonably useful session; attendance of members of parliament had been good, the standard of debate had been high, and the Assembly itself had seemed pleased with the results. This was not, however, to say that the results were satisfactory from the point of view of the Council. The Assembly was convinced it was its prerogative and responsibility to discuss European defence matters in full knowledge of the facts and would not abandon this position. However, the Assembly seemed to be wearying of the argument and if they were not given some satisfaction, a crisis might well develop; it would, therefore, seem advisable for Governments to consider re-examining the attitude they had adopted.

The material organisation of the session had been good and it must be recognised that this was due in large measure to the Office of the Clerk. In this connection, the Chairman drew attention to the fact that the administrative services of the Council of Europe were tending, not perhaps towards disinteresting themselves from the organisation of sessions of other Assemblies, so much as towards providing less and less facilities for such meetings.

Mr. von HERWARTH endorsed the remarks of the Chairman about the recent session. His impression was that a serious crisis was impending. The Ministers would clearly have to face the problem of the Assembly's views on the responsibilities of W.E.U. in defence matters. If some way was not found to meet the Assembly, he feared there would be a sort of "revolution"; it could not be denied that it would be very dangerous to have the members of parliament of the Seven countries against the Council in this way. Mr. von Brentano, who greatly regretted that he had been unable to represent the Council at the Assembly because of his sudden illness, took a very serious view of the situation and would like to discuss it with his colleagues at the next meeting of the Council at ministerial level in December. Mr. von Herwarth believed that the personal feeling of Mr. von Brentano on the question was very strong, and that he considered some measure of satisfaction should be given to the wishes of the Assembly which he felt to be justified. This should not be difficult, provided it was done in time.

Mr. von Herwarth thought that members were particularly irritated that so few Ministers attended sessions; continuous ministerial representation would seem desirable, in spite of the many practical difficulties this must involve. The same problem had, of course, appeared, in even more acute form, in the Consultative Assembly.

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The questions that would have been put to Mr. von Brentano at the session had now been forwarded to him. Mr. von Herwarth felt sure that before replying, he would like the Council to be consulted.

So far as the Assembly's Recommendations were concerned, Mr. von Herwarth felt that the most important should be considered by the Ministers; if this was agreed, it would probably be advisable to prepare the problems involved beforehand.

Mr. von Herwarth informed the Council that the President of the Assembly would visit Bonn on 31st October to discuss with the German Foreign Minister a possible modus operandi for the future, with a view to ensuring more harmonious co-operation between the Council and the Assembly. Mr. von Herwarth added that he felt it was most fortunate that Sir James Hutchison should hold this office, since he handled the Assembly so ably and tactfully; his personality seemed a good guarantee that a satisfactory solution could be reached between the Council and the Assembly.

Finally, Mr. von Herwarth said that from conversations with members of the Assembly it seemed that many of them were not aware of the contents of the Council's Annual Report. It might be worth considering making it shorter or less elaborate.

M. CHAUVEL considered there were two kinds of problems before the Council. First, formal ones, such as the presence of Ministers at Assembly sessions: he felt sure that some acceptable solution could be found. Secondly, of substance, and in particular Recommendation 18. The argument between the Council and the Assembly had been going on for some time now, and unless some way out could be found, it seemed likely to continue for a long time. Incidentally, M. Chauvel rather doubted whether parliamentarians realised that the members of the Council, including the Ministers, could only speak to the Assembly on behalf of the Council, which had only one voice, and not as national representatives.

Mr. STIKKER, though he had not been in Strasbourg, had gained the impression from newspaper reports that the Assembly had had a distinct feeling of frustration, and he had been glad to learn that this was not in fact so marked.

He agreed with M. Chauvel that the problem of the responsibilities of W.E.U. seemed likely to remain endemic. But this was a problem for Governments to tackle, and Mr. Stikker thought it most advisable that the Ministers should give it their attention. He recalled that the Council had not contested the Assembly's view of their competence; the trouble was there was nobody to reply to them. It seemed to him that many parliamentarians would like to have some kind of High Authority to do this. However, it would certainly be difficult to go on as at present, for

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the pressure of the Assembly was becoming very strong. It would, therefore, seem urgent to discuss in the Council whether some means could not be found of giving the Assembly more information. For this purpose, it would be useful to have instructions from Governments as to whether some way could be found of doing this without affecting the attitude of the Council on the fundamental principle that competence in defence matters had been transferred to N.A.T.O.

Sir Anthony RUMBOLD said that he also had received the impression of frustration in the Assembly. Some British parliamentarians had gone so far as to say that unless relations between the Council and the Assembly were improved before the Spring session, there would be a sort of "strike", in the sense that there would be no speakers for the debates. It was clearly inadmissible for the Assembly to be allowed to collapse in this way.

Sir Anthony had the feeling that the parliamentarians would be satisfied with not very much; the question was to find what would suffice. He himself had thought of a few ways which might contribute. First, when replying to the Assembly's Recommendations, the Council, in addition to answering the actual questions, could add a rider the effect of which would be to send the ball back to the Assembly by putting some new point to them for their views. Secondly, the Council might pick out some particular points in the Annual Report and ask the Assembly for their opinion - this would help to meet the German Ambassador's point that parliamentarians did not know the contents of the Report.

However, the main problem was the debate of defence questions. Sir Anthony agreed that this should be discussed by the Ministers at the next meeting as Mr. von Brentano wished. One Recommendation in particular - No. 18 - should be submitted to them, and advance preparation, in London, on the problems involved, would be useful. He thought that if the Council could meet the Assembly over the second part of this Recommendation that would solve the problem.

Sir Anthony concluded by drawing attention to one point by which he had been very much struck in Strasbourg. This was that the idea of a "European defence policy" seemed to be present in the speeches of several members; he thought this was a very dangerous tendency.

M. ZOPPI agreed that the problem of responsibility in defence matters should be discussed by the Ministers and also that the matter should first be prepared in the Council. He pointed out that the Assembly was asking for information of a detailed and technical nature which the Council did not have; if Governments came to consider that the wish of the Assembly to have more information should be met, the Council would have to be given the means of supplying it.

/In M. CHAMPENOIS' ...

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In M. CHAMPENOIS' view, the Assembly crisis was in reality an artificial one - they were interpreting the Treaty according to the letter and not the spirit in which it had been drawn up. This problem would have to be faced nonetheless, but he did not think it could be solved by such measures as the presence of Ministers at sessions. The solution proposed by the Assembly - that the Permanent Representatives of the Seven on the North Atlantic Council should keep the Assembly Committee informed - did not seem to be practicable, for it left unresolved the difficulty that a limited number of N.A.T.O. representatives could not give information which was the property of all. The only real solution would be to widen the Assembly and link it to N.A.T.O. In view of the definition of their competence, the W.E.U. Council could never reply to the Assembly's legitimate demands for information and, as a result, would always be on difficult ground with the Assembly.

Referring to Sir Anthony's remarks about the idea of a "European defence policy", M. Champenois thought it most important to convince parliamentarians that the defence of Europe could not be conceived as a purely seven-Power responsibility, but must be regarded as the joint responsibility of all the partners, i.e., the United States and Canada, and the other non-W.E.U. members of N.A.T.O.

Mr. von HERWARTH agreed that the "European defence policy" idea was a very dangerous one.

Mr. STIKKER agreed, but wondered whether it was a positive or a negative concept, i.e., was it anti-American.

The CHAIRMAN thought there had been some anti-American bias, but added that this impression had been partially corrected during the Consultative Assembly debates, since certain parliamentarians had presumably thought they had gone rather too far.

M. CHAUVEL agreed with M. Champenois that the parliamentarians were giving to the W.E.U. Treaties, and particularly to Article V, an independent value which went further than the North Atlantic Treaty provisions; it was on this that they seemed to have based their tendency to a "European defence policy". They clearly did not wish W.E.U. to be diluted within N.A.T.O.; the same preoccupation appeared in paragraph 2 of Recommendation 20.

It seemed to M. Chauvel that there was another problem - this time of a national kind - concerning the parliamentarians. They had asked their Governments in national parliaments for replies on the policy of N.A.T.O. and the Governments had answered that they were not competent.

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The parliamentarians seemed to think that in national parliaments Governments were hiding behind the screen of N.A.T.O. They had, therefore, turned to W.E.U., considering that the replies denied them in national parliaments should be given in the international forum. It seemed that this aspect of the question must make a solution even more difficult, since it meant that national policies were also involved.

M. ZOPPI agreed with M. Chauvel's point concerning the Assembly's view of Article V. As regards a possible anti-American bias, his view was rather that certain parliamentarians feared that United States interests might not be the same as those of Europe, and that Europe should, therefore, be able to defend herself alone if necessary, should the United States not come to her aid immediately.

The CHAIRMAN did not think that parliamentarians necessarily saw any contradiction between their anxiety to ensure that Europe was adequately defended, and defence within the Atlantic framework. They had perhaps insisted too much on the former, but did not conceive of the defence of Europe outside this Atlantic framework.

The COUNCIL:

DECIDED to discuss the Recommendations of the Assembly once more before deciding on the procedure to be adopted in preparing for their discussion by the Ministers; they also decided to devote a meeting to this question alone as soon as possible.

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