

Extract from minutes of the joint meeting between the WEU Assembly and Council (15 December 1957)

Caption: At their joint meeting held on 15 December 1957, the Assembly and Council of Western European Union outline suggestions for improving relations between the two bodies.

Source: National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew. <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk>, Records of international organizations, DG. Copies of records of the Brussels Treaty Organisation and Western European Union. Brussels Treaty Organisations and Western European Union: Microfilm copies of files, DG 1.

Council of the Western European Union. Extract from minutes of joint meeting, Assembly and WEU Council, Relations between the Council and the Assembly. Document N° C(57)232. [s.l.]: 15.12.1957. 3 p.

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W.E.U. COUNCIL 1969

FILE NO:

EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF ~~Joint~~ MEETING *Assembly*
~~of~~ W.E.U. COUNCIL HELD ON 15 Dec. '57 (C/57) 232

1. Relations between the Council and the Assembly

The CHAIRMAN *Mr. von Brentano* on behalf of the Council outlined a number of suggestions for improving relations between the Council and the Assembly:

a) the Council considered that the presence of Ministers at Assembly sessions was most desirable, and that Ministers should be prepared to answer questions from the parliamentarians. Mr. von BRENTANO observed, however, that it was often difficult for all Ministers to be available at these times, but that it was most desirable that some Ministers should always take part in the debates of the Assembly.

b) the Council thought it would be helpful if further joint meetings between the Assembly and the Council of Ministers were held, in particular during sessions of the Assembly.

c) the Council also thought it would be useful if the ministerial organs were, in co-operation with the Presidents of the various Assemblies, to work out a timetable for meetings of the European Assemblies, reserving definite periods in the Spring and Autumn for the series of sessions. This would facilitate attendance by Ministers at the Assemblies and would presumably be also welcome to parliamentarians. Mr. von BRENTANO suggested that the President might take the initiative on this matter with the other European Assembly Presidents.

Sir James HUTCHISON said the Assembly believed that W.E.U. must continue, and might indeed have a more important task to fulfil in the future than in the past. He was glad to hear that the Council wished to strengthen relations with the Assembly, for there was a certain feeling that the Council had shown a lack of interest on this score. Sir James recalled President Eisenhower's view that W.E.U. should form the core of unity at the heart of N.A.T.O. It seemed generally accepted, moreover, that the Assembly had a significant rôle to play in educating public opinion.

In this connection, he referred to the enhanced prestige of the Assembly which would undoubtedly result from the presence of Ministers at its sessions. There had recently been a tendency for the Assembly to disintegrate in the sense that some members doubted whether it was any good going on with a job in which so little interest seemed to be shown at ministerial level. The attendance of Ministers, but not necessarily Foreign Ministers, not only at Assembly sessions but also at Committee meetings, if the precedent of the Council of Europe were taken into account, would help to remedy this situation. As an example, Sir James went on to explain the advantages that would be gained from the presence of Ministers of Defence at meetings of the Committee on Defence Questions and Armaments, as experience had shown.

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The CHAIRMAN said that the possibility of other Ministers attending had not been considered by the Council. He personally thought it might be arranged in exceptional cases, but the principle whereby the proper representatives of the Council were the Foreign Ministers, must be respected.

M. PELLA agreed. There should be observance of the principle that the spokesmen for the agreed views of governments should be the Foreign Ministers, though as an exceptional measure a Minister of Defence might accompany the Foreign Minister.

Mr. SELWYN LLOYD would see no objection, generally speaking, to other Ministers meeting the Assembly on condition that they acted as deputies of the Foreign Ministers and spoke on their behalf. However, he thought that attendance by Defence Ministers should be regarded as a special case, to which further consideration must be given.

Mr. van der BEUGEL agreed with this view.

Marchese LUCIFERO, speaking as President of the Assembly Defence Committee, said that Sir James Hutchison had raised a fundamental question in referring to the presence of Ministers or Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State at Committee meetings. This was an indispensable element in the good relations between the Council and the Assembly. Many past difficulties could have been avoided had his Committee been able to address their questions at joint meetings to a politically responsible representative of the Council.

The CHAIRMAN said he could not commit the Council on this question, since it had not been discussed by them. He wished, however, to stress that the Assembly's partner was the Council as such, and their representatives must be able to speak on their behalf and voice a common Council view. In principle, no Minister should meet representatives of the Assembly without prior discussion with his colleagues of points likely to be raised.

M. SCHMID enquired whether it could not be conceded that a Minister would attend committee meetings to interpret the general conclusions agreed by the Council.

The CHAIRMAN personally considered that the attendance of Ministers or Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State at committee meetings could be accepted provided that the Council received advance warning of the questions which would be asked so that they could reach a common view point.

/Mr. SELWYN LLOYD ...

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Mr. SELWYN LLOYD thought that recognition of the value of personal contacts would lead in practice to the development of suitable procedure.

After further discussion, the meeting agreed as follows:

- a) that Ministers would attend Assembly sessions;
- b) that joint meetings between the Assembly and the Council at ministerial level would be held, in particular, during Assembly sessions;
- c) that one or more Ministers would attend committee meetings on behalf of the Council where necessary, on the understanding that the latter were informed in advance of the questions to be raised;
- d) that it would be useful if a timetable of European Assembly meetings could be drawn up, providing for periods to be set aside for these sessions during the spring and autumn.