

Extract from minutes of the 139th meeting of the WEU Council (24 November 1959)

Caption: During the meeting of the Council of Western European Union (WEU) held on 24 November 1959, the British representative Sir Anthony Rumbold notes that the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) is the most important forum in terms of 'political consultations' but that this in no way detracts from the value of bilateral discussions, which reflect nations' individuality. Furthermore, with regard to the 'political consultations' held between the Six to establish a joint position at international level, the British Government believes that WEU represents a forum in which such political questions can be discussed with the United Kingdom.

Source: Council of the Western European Union. Extract from minutes of the 139th meeting of W.E.U Council held on 24 Nov 59. CR(59)17. 5 p. Archives nationales de Luxembourg (ANLux). <http://www.anlux.lu>. Western European Union Archives. Secretariat-General/Council's Archives. 1954-1987. Relations with non member countries and other international organisations. Year: 1962, 01/12/1955-30/06/1962. File 350.00. Volume 1/2.

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EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF 130th MEETING
OF W.E.U. COUNCIL HELD ON 24 NOV 59

II. VISITS TO LONDON OF THE CHANCELLOR OF THE FEDERAL
GERMAN REPUBLIC AND THE FOREIGN MINISTER OF THE
NETHERLANDS

M. Coffe

The CHAIRMAN enquired whether Sir Anthony Rumbold or the Ambassadors of the Federal German Republic or the Netherlands wished to say anything about aspects of the recent visits to London of the Chancellor of the Federal German Republic and of the Foreign Minister of the Netherlands which might be of particular interest to the Council.

Sir Anthony RUMBOLD wished to preface his remarks with some considerations of a general nature. He did not regard giving information about such consultations or conversations as constituting "political consultations" within the Council. "Political consultations" meant in reality discussions which aimed at reaching results in the form of common decisions or action. For these, NATO was the most important forum, containing as it did all the members of the Atlantic Alliance. This view did not detract in any way from the value of bilateral talks. However much political consultation developed in NATO, nations retained their individuality and would continue to hold bilateral consultations. Further, if bilateral conversations were held with the feeling that they would be immediately and fully reported in a larger forum, they might thereby be deprived of much of their value.

/MM. CHAUVEL and BENTINCK .

W.E.U. CONFIDENTIAL

W.E.U. CONFIDENTIAL

CR (59) 17

MM. CHAUVEL and BENTINCK agreed with Sir Anthony's remarks. The latter stressed, however, that results in the form of decisions or common activities were not a necessary constituent of "political consultations"; exchanges of view and clarifications of attitude could also come under this head, and were often of the greatest value.

The CHAIRMAN stressed that it was only where such conversations were publicly reported as having borne upon matters of direct concern to the Organisation that he had suggested the Council might with advantage be informed.

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Regarding Dr. Adenauer's visit, Sir Anthony RUMBOLD stated that the very frank discussions had clearly established that the differences of opinion alleged by the Press to have arisen between the two sides did not in fact exist. For instance, one of the subjects on which the British Government felt their position had been misrepresented, and about which the Chancellor had expressed concern, was that of disengagement. The Prime Minister had made it quite clear to Dr. Adenauer that his Government were not in favour of disengagement in any form; furthermore, as regards proposals for zones of controlled armaments, the British Government were only in favour in so far as they featured in, firstly, the anti-surprise attack proposals put forward by the British and other Governments in 1957 and, secondly, the so-called "Western Peace Plan", presented in Geneva in 1959, to both of which the German Government and NATO had assented. There was no "Macmillan plan", or other scheme, for disengagement in the mind of the British Government.

"Summit" conference preparations had also been discussed, and no difference of approach had emerged; far from it being the case, as suggested in the Press, that the United Kingdom wished to discuss the Berlin problem only, and the Federal Republic only disarmament, the Heads of Government saw the necessity for examination of both these vital problems.

The Prime Minister had explained to the Chancellor, as had Mr. Selwyn Lloyd to MM. Couve de Murville and Luns, that he found the prospect of Europe being economically divided an extremely serious one. He had stressed most strongly how important he felt it was for the future of the Alliance that this should not happen, and his hope that Dr. Adenauer would do everything possible to make it easier to bridge the economic gulf.

/Regarding ...

W.E.U. CONFIDENTIAL

W.E.U. CONFIDENTIAL

CR (59) 17

Regarding political consultations, the British Ministers had proposed to the Chancellor, and also to Mr. Luns, that should the Six develop their own political institutions in such a way as to result in consultations about political matters of concern to others outside the Six, or in a Six-Power point of view being presented in other larger organisations, W.E.U. was at hand to provide the forum in which such matters could first be discussed with the United Kingdom, and where the latter's attitude could be made clear. This did not of course mean that political consultations in W.E.U. should be artificially stimulated for their own sake; it should simply be borne in mind that W.E.U. was there to serve any such useful purpose and, in order to mark this fact, the seven Ministers should meet from time to time.

Mr. von HERWARTH thanked Sir Anthony for his clear summary of the salient points of the conversations. He underlined that these had been most friendly and frank, and that rumours of differences of opinion were attributable to the Press. As Sir Anthony had said, the Prime Minister had convinced the Chancellor that there was no plan for disengagement.

On the "Summit" preparations, very much the same opinions had been expressed by both sides. On disarmament, the German Government considered the proposals recently made by the United Kingdom Secretary of State in the United Nations to be a good foundation; both Governments would be giving much thought to the work to be done by the Ten-Power Committee. These latter questions were, of course, to be discussed in NATO shortly.

Referring to the important item of economic developments in Europe, the Chancellor had fully agreed that a trade war between the Six and the Outer Seven was an unthinkable contingency - Europe formed one unit and could not be split in such a way. The German visitors had stressed that E.E.C. had already given evidence of its liberal policy; the six partners hoped this would be pursued in the future and would do everything possible to prevent friction in the economic field.

As to political consultations, Dr. Adenauer had agreed that W.E.U. was the appropriate forum for discussions between the Six and Great Britain; he was prepared for their intensification should this prove desirable.

/Baron ...

W.E.U. CONFIDENTIAL

W.E.U. CONFIDENTIAL

CR (59) 17

Baron BENTINCK thanked Sir Anthony and Mr. von Herwarth for their summaries of the recent conversations. His Government shared the views of the German Chancellor, as presented by Mr. von Herwarth.

: Regarding political consultations between the Six,
: Baron Bentinck reaffirmed that these, in the view of Mr. Luns,
: should not tend to assume an exclusive character.

: Regarding the question of the possible transfer of
: the Headquarters of W.E.U. to Paris, his Government was not
: in favour. In reply to queries as to the reasons, Baron Bentinck
: stated that his Government felt that W.E.U. was the only
: European organisation linking the United Kingdom to the
: Continent which had its headquarters in London and it might
: be wrongly interpreted if the "physical" aspect of this link -
: the Headquarters in London - were broken. Further, his
: Government felt that a transfer to Paris might lead to a
: drowning of W.E.U. in NATO. The Permanent Representatives to
: the N.A.C. might feel some reluctance to act as W.E.U. Council
: members because this would not be looked upon with favour by
: their other N.A.C. colleagues; an awkward situation might
: result for the Permanent Representatives, who would tend to
: take less interest than was desirable in W.E.U.

: Regarding economic developments, Baron Bentinck
: recalled that on the occasion of the signature of the E.F.T.A.
: agreement in Stockholm, the seven Ministers had reaffirmed
: their determination to promote closer economic co-operation
: between the members of OEEC, including the six members of
: the E.E.C. This was also the wish of the Six, who felt
: strongly that an economic gulf would be a disaster. Mr. Luns
: had shown Mr. Selwyn Lloyd the proposals to be made in
: Strasbourg on 23rd November concerning tariff cuts. Finally,
: the Ministers had agreed that OEEC must continue to be the
: main organ for economic co-operation between the European
: countries.

Sir Anthony RUMBOLD remarked that Mr. Luns had indeed informed Mr. Selwyn Lloyd of the tariff cut proposals, but this was, of course, a matter of concern to the Six, of which the British Minister could only take note.

Commenting on Baron Bentinck's explanations concerning his Government's attitude to a possible move of the headquarters of W.E.U. to Paris, Sir Anthony said that his Government felt it was precisely because the Permanent Representatives were fully conversant with all matters concerning the Alliance, not merely military, but also political since NATO was the main forum for consultations, that they saw advantage in the move to Paris. They did not consider that the interests of W.E.U. would in any way be subordinated to those of NATO. The matter had been raised during Mr. Luns' visit; Mr. Selwyn Lloyd had pointed out the practical advantages he saw in a move, but the matter had been left there. It might perhaps be discussed further by the Ministers at their forthcoming meeting.

/M. CHAUVEL ...

W.E.U. CONFIDENTIAL

- 8 -

W.E.U. CONFIDENTIAL

CR (59) 17

M. CHAUVEL said that when the matter had been touched upon by Mr. Selwyn Lloyd and M. Couve de Murville in Paris, the possibility of identical representation in the North Atlantic and W.E.U. Councils had been discussed. Though no position had been adopted in the matter by the French Government their idea had been, rather, that the W.E.U. Council members should be the Ambassadors to France.