

## Extract from minutes of the 234th meeting of the WEU Council held at ministerial level (The Hague, 25–26 October 1963)

**Caption:** At the 234th meeting of the Council of Western European Union (WEU), held at ministerial level on 25 and 26 October 1963 in The Hague, the delegations discuss the development of East–West relations. The British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Richard Austen Butler, emphasises that relations have improved, but he does not believe that there has been a fundamental change in the basic aims of Soviet foreign policy. Although the United Kingdom is determined to defend the Western position in Berlin, he calls for ongoing dialogue with the Soviet Union with a view to achieving real disarmament. The position of French Foreign Minister Maurice Couve de Murville differs from the UK position with respect to the method that should be used to reach agreements with the Soviets. Couve de Murville believes that détente depends entirely on the USSR, the originator of the Cold War. This is why the French Government has not taken part in the recent East–West negotiations. He also stresses that he has every confidence in his allies not to arrive at any arrangement which would harm Western interests.

**Source:** Council of the Western European Union. Extract from minutes of 234th meeting of WEU Council held at ministerial level in The Hague on 25th and 26th October 1963. II. Political Consultations. CR (63) 20. Part I. pp. 8-10; 12-14. Archives nationales de Luxembourg (ANLux). <http://www.anlux.lu>. Western European Union Archives. Secretariat-General/Council's Archives. 1954-1987. Foundation and Expansion of WEU. Year: 1963, 01/10/1963-30/11/1965. File 132.15. Volume 1/7.

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**Last updated:** 13/10/2016

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FILE NO :

CR (63)20 Pt. I

EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF 234<sup>th</sup> MEETING  
OF W.E.U. COUNCIL HELD ~~ON~~ AT MINISTERIAL LEVEL  
IN THE HAGUE ON 25<sup>th</sup> & 26<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER 1963

[Chairman : Mr. LUNS]

## II. POLITICAL CONSULTATIONS

### 1. East-West relations

[Mr. LUNS]

On the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. BUTLER opened the discussion on this item.

He did not think there was any need to go into the detail of the series of meetings which had taken place recently between MM. Gromyko and Rusk and Lord Home, which had been fully discussed in NATO. He was, however, anxious to hear the views of his colleagues on the present situation and on the possibility of reaching agreement, even if only of a limited nature, with the Russians.

In the first place, he wished to draw attention to the change in the atmosphere in which East-West exchanges were now being held. The Russians seemed more ready to listen, even when they disagreed with the Western viewpoints; there was more realism, and less propaganda. It would, of course, be naive to believe that there had been a fundamental change in the basic aims of Soviet foreign policy: they were still seeking to consolidate the Communist régime in Eastern Germany, to obtain Western recognition of the status quo in Eastern and Central Europe, and, above all, to promote divisions in the Western alliance. Nor could any relaxation be expected in the political, economic and ideological struggle for the uncommitted world. On the other hand, the Soviets had had to take into account three important considerations which had brought about a change in their tactics. Firstly, they had come to realise that war, or the threat of war, was no longer an instrument of policy in the nuclear age, and that a policy of confrontation, of which the climax had been the Cuba affair, led nowhere. Secondly, there was no doubt that the Soviets were finding difficulty in resolving the conflicting demands of defence and the other calls on their resources. Thirdly, the Soviets were faced by the problem of the Chinese challenge to their leadership of the world Communist movement.

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It was of course too early to say whether these particular factors would mean that the Soviets were prepared to enter into far-reaching agreements. Nonetheless, the possibility of worthwhile negotiations seemed more real than it had for a long time, and the Western reaction to the new Soviet tactics might influence the evolution of Soviet policy.

It was therefore of the first importance for the West to keep in touch, and to try to discover how Russian thinking was developing. If the West made no response, they might play into the hands of the doctrinaire elements in the Soviet Union, who favoured a more rigid attitude. If the dialogue could be kept going, it was difficult to see what the West had to lose; on the contrary, it could be foreseen that the way might open for progress towards real disarmament and to an increasing penetration of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in terms of trade, information and cultural contacts.

The recent talks had revealed certain possible fields for partial agreement. The Russians and Americans had reached a joint understanding on nuclear weapons in outer space. Other subjects, such as observation posts, the non-dissemination of nuclear weapons, mutual destruction of bombers and delivery vehicles, and non-aggression arrangements, had been explored. Mr. Gromyko had seemed unyielding, but the possibility remained that he might take some account of the Western arguments, and it might well turn out that before long new Soviet proposals would be made which it would be worthwhile to discuss.

However, the fundamental problem of Berlin and Germany remained; there was no prospect of any immediate progress here. But if progress were to be made, this was only possible in an atmosphere of relaxed international tension in which arrangements could perhaps be worked out which would be unacceptable under other circumstances. It was only by making progress in other limited fields, always, of course, without giving up any essential positions, that the West could hope to arrive at a possible approach to an acceptable settlement.

The United States and United Kingdom Governments were determined to defend the Western position in Berlin along with their allies. To this end, they would continue to insist on three essentials: the maintenance of the freedom and viability of West Berlin, the retention of the allied garrisons in the city, and free access to the city.

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It had been suggested in this connection that the recent incidents in the Berlin corridor might require a reassessment of Soviet intentions. The United Kingdom Government were not sure that this was the case. The first incident, involving U.S. convoys, might be the result of a genuine confusion over procedures or of a local initiative; the second, involving a United Kingdom convoy, might be a consequence of a Soviet decision to establish a clearly defined dismounting procedure. But it could also be that the Soviets wished to draw the West into further discussions by demonstrating the ease with which they could disrupt the whole situation. If so, there would be a possibility of further trouble, but the United Kingdom Government were inclined to doubt the likelihood of a major row.

The view had been expressed that because Western and Soviet long-term aims were in fundamental opposition, any arrangement that suited the East was automatically bad for the West. Mr. Butler did not think this was a logical argument. It would be dangerous to make concessions without a quid pro quo; but there had been over the past years examples of agreements that were beneficial to both sides, for example, the end of the Berlin blockade in 1949, the Austrian State Treaty in 1954, the Geneva Agreement on Laos of the same year, and, finally, the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. Whether there were other fields offering the same possibility remained to be seen, but there was always a chance that this might prove the case and the chance should not be missed. Public opinion was behind these explorations.

In conclusion, Mr. Butler stressed that any probing of Russian intentions must be based on the determination to preserve Western unity and to act from strength in common accord between the Allies.

Mr. SCHROEDER shared in general the views expressed by Mr. Butler. It was true that during past years certain agreements had been arrived at with the Soviets which were useful and beneficial to both parties; but the dangers were obvious. In a period of relaxation, there was always a risk that a mistaken feeling of security would arise, which could have harmful effects on the unity and strength of the West. Public opinion tended to expect more from probings such as those now taking place than responsible statesmen could obtain: if those responsible showed optimism, public opinion would tend towards over-optimism and a resultant easing of effort, whereas the need was to maintain strength, the fundamental condition for success in negotiation. There was thus a dilemma in the relations between Governments and public opinion.

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M. PICCIONI shared the view that recent developments showed that certain internal factors in the Soviet Union had played a part in bringing that country to envisage a détente; despite some difficulty experienced in carrying forward the East-West dialogue, the atmosphere of détente had persisted. The U.S.S.R. were obviously seeking to establish an order of priorities for settling the different problems; although this order did not correspond to that of the West, it might be possible to influence it.

The Italian Government, in close consultation with its allies, would seek to further an atmosphere of détente at the Disarmament Conference, as well as in other competent international frameworks. M. Piccioni considered it indispensable that the unity and solidarity of the West be reinforced, not only in order to help towards the success of the negotiations, but to provide a defence against any attempt to exploit the improved atmosphere in a way that could affect the problems of Germany and Berlin.

In the first place, M. Piccioni wished to refer to NATO, where Italy had strongly supported the intensification of political consultations and had associated herself in principle with the plan for a multilateral nuclear force within the Alliance. On the European front, it was essential that progress be made towards wider forms of economic integration and closer institutionalised political cooperation. In this connection, W.E.U. could play a most useful role by providing the opportunity for regular consultations.

M. Piccioni also pointed out that the increasing solidarity of Europe could be of assistance in relations with the satellite countries of Eastern Europe. The tendency towards more freedom inside the Communist system seemed a long-term possibility, but it appeared to justify the West in attempting to increase its economic and cultural exchanges with those countries, and also to give them some idea of its human and political values.

M. COUVE de MURVILLE welcomed this opportunity to exchange views on the international situation, and in particular on East-West relations, on which the French Government's views differed in some respects from those expressed by previous speakers.

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In the first place, M. Couve de Murville would like to deal with the Moscow Test Ban Treaty independently of the general problem of East-West relations. This Treaty had a different scope according to the countries concerned: the three original Signatories, having completed their programmes, had made a symbolic gesture by undertaking not to carry out further tests in the atmosphere; a second category of countries was not engaged in the production of atomic weapons, and had therefore adhered to the Treaty without difficulty; finally, however, there was France, whose programme was in train; if she had adhered to the Treaty, she would have been the only country for whom it would have had practical consequences, since she would have had to interrupt or cancel her programme. It was for this reason only that she had not adhered to the Treaty.

This was, however, now a matter of the part, and what interested the Governments here represented was the future, in the shape of the evolution of the cold war towards a détente, and the establishment of more normal relations between East and West. This détente depended exclusively on the will of the Soviet Union, the originator of the cold war; it was enough for her to start speaking in terms of a détente for the West to show interest in reaching agreement. M. Couve de Murville recalled the international crisis over Berlin, at the end of 1958, the change in the situation in the autumn of 1959 at the time of the Eisenhower/Kruschev interview at Camp David, and the general improvement in the atmosphere which had led to a summit conference being foreseen for the spring of 1960. Suddenly, however, the Soviets had put a stop to this whole development, many differing reasons being advanced for their change in attitude, for which flights over their territory seemed only a pretext.

This historical sequence served as an illustration of the fact that the problem of achieving a détente was conditional upon the will of the Soviets to achieve it; now again, signs of a wish to improve the atmosphere were evident on the Soviet side, stemming perhaps from the Cuban affair, and from the internal situation in the Soviet Union. As regards Cuba, it should be remembered that in Europe, the possibility of atomic war over this question had not been seriously envisaged; but for the United States and the Soviet Union, the two real protagonists, it had been a different matter. They had retained, from the imminence of the danger, the deep feeling that atomic war was inconceivable, and this had undoubtedly had an influence on the international context. So far as the internal situation in Russia was concerned, it was certain that the dispute with China and the economic situation, aggravated by the disastrous agricultural situation which had resulted in the recent massive buying of foodstuffs, were important factors influencing the Soviet attitude.

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It was in this perspective that the present situation should be seen, and the view of the French Government differed somewhat from that of the other member countries. France was not taking part in the recent East-West negotiations because of the difference between her opinion of the methods that should be used to achieve a détente, and that of the other Western countries involved. The French Government considered that a détente depended on the decision of the Soviet Government; it was up to that Government to show a real will towards that end. If the Soviets were to put a stop to those activities which had created the cold war situation, the international atmosphere would improve, the discussion of the fundamental problems would become possible, real disarmament could be started and the German problem could be solved.

It seemed to the French Government that the negotiations were concerned with subjects which were not the vital ones. If they proved successful, the results would be disadvantageous to the West, since they could mean the crystallization of the German situation or the first steps towards neutralisation of Central Europe, including Germany, both equally unacceptable. The Russians, who were anxious to legalise the existence of the two Germanies, carefully avoided considering discussion of anything that would legalise the Western situation in Berlin. As regards the recent incidents, M. Couve de Murville thought that, whatever their cause, the important point was that they showed once more the precarious nature of the Western position in Berlin.

M. Couve de Murville shared Mr. Butler's view that any agreement must be beneficial to both sides. The French Government was not, of course, against a détente; where they differed from the other member countries was in the method. They had every confidence in their American and British friends not to arrive at any arrangement which would harm Western interests. This had been amply demonstrated in talks M. Couve de Murville had had recently with Mr. Rusk, and on the previous evening with Mr. Butler. It was clear that there was no divergence on the core of the problem, but only on the question of method. Only the future would show whether progress towards a détente was feasible.

M. SPAAK agreed with Mr. Butler's appreciation of the present situation; he would like, however, to make a few additional observations in this connection.

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