

Extract from minutes of the 256th meeting of the WEU Council held at ministerial level (Paris, 16–17 July 1964)

Caption: At the 256th meeting of the Council of Western European Union (WEU), held at ministerial level on 16 and 17 July 1964 in Paris, the delegations discuss the development of East–West relations and particularly analyse the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic (GDR), signed on 12 June 1964. The British Foreign Secretary, Richard Austen Butler, and the French Foreign Minister, Maurice Couve de Murville, note that the USSR is currently preoccupied with internal problems, including its conflict with China and the difficult relations with some satellite countries in Eastern Europe, which are calling for greater independence. The French delegate and his English counterpart underline that the Western countries should take advantage of this situation, for example by developing relations with the countries of Eastern Europe. Concerning the conference on disarmament, Richard Austen Butler states that he believes it is possible to reach agreement with the USSR on nuclear non-proliferation, despite the establishment of a multilateral nuclear force. On this matter, the French minister points out that his government, unclear as to the purpose of the operation, is not taking part in discussions on the subject and that the USSR is opposed to the establishment of such a force.

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FILE No :

EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF 256th MEETING

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OF W.E.U. COUNCIL HELD ON AT MINISTERIAL
LEVEL IN PARIS ON 16th + 17th JULY 1964

Chairman: M. Couve de Murville

II. POLITICAL CONSULTATIONS

1. East-West relations

Mr. CARSTENS would like to comment on the Treaty of 12th June 1964 between the U.S.S.R. and the so-called "German Democratic Republic". He considered that certain of the points contained in this document, such as the intention of the signatories to bring about the conclusion of a German peace treaty and to normalise the situation in Berlin, were of lesser importance, being in fact only a repetition of the obligations arising from the Warsaw Treaty. There were, however, three statements in the Treaty of major significance; the first was that Berlin was an "independent political unit"; the second,

II. POLITICAL CONSULTATION

1. East-West relations

Recalling that several statesmen from member countries had recently been in direct contact with rulers in Eastern Europe, the CHAIRMAN asked the United Kingdom Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to address the Council.

Mr. STEWART said that it was always difficult to estimate the real mind and intention of either the Soviet Government or the Governments of the smaller Communist countries in Eastern Europe. He would, however, try to give an account of such impressions as his Government had been able to form. It appeared that both Mr. Kosygin and Mr. Brezhnev had expressed determination to maintain the principle of collective leadership and not allow one man to dominate as Khrushchev had done. One could regard this with some scepticism since the same had been said after the disappearance of Stalin from the scene. Among internal

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Mr. Luns then mentioned his conversations with other Russian leaders. On the whole much the same themes had been pursued, with much the same arguments. One of them had said that he could not understand why the Western Powers had not altered their attitude towards the Soviet Union since de-Stalinisation, this process having increased the degree of freedom enjoyed inside Russia. Mr. Luns had replied that it had made very little difference to the foreign policy of the Soviet Union, apart from certain agreements with the United States.

Mr. Luns would refer to other problems evoked in these talks, such as China and Cyprus, under their appropriate headings on the agenda.

Mr. BUTLER welcomed this further opportunity to discuss East-West relations in the framework of W.E.U., and expressed his interest in the contributions made by Mr. Carstens and Mr. Luns. He noted that the Russians remained heavily preoccupied with their internal economic problems and with the Sino-Soviet dispute, and in his view the difficulties encountered in achieving progress were hardly surprising. He was himself to visit the Soviet Union towards the end of July, and was glad of this opportunity for a preliminary exchange of views in the Council.

Referring to the recent treaty between the U.S.S.R. and the Soviet zone régime in Germany, Mr. Butler thought it significant in that it marked the end of an epoch; the Russians appeared to have shelved indefinitely the idea of a separate peace treaty with the eastern zone of Germany, and Herr Ulbricht had in fact stated that he did not wish for one. The Russians were apparently willing to continue shouldering their responsibilities in this matter and to accept the continued presence of the Allies in Berlin. They had learned that interference with Allied access into that city could quickly lead to a major crisis and they were evidently anxious to make any crucial decisions on this subject themselves, rather than to hand over responsibility to the East Germans. The Treaty thus constituted an important change in Soviet policy, and even seemed to recognise the Allied position in Berlin. The West must, however, remain on its guard, and the United Kingdom would continue to give the fullest support to the Western point of view in this matter.

Turning to the possibility, evoked by Mr. Carstens, of recognition of the Soviet zone régime by some of the African countries attending the Cairo Conference, Mr. Butler could state that his informal conversations with certain delegations at the recent Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference, notably with those of Ceylon (which had previously seemed disposed to give diplomatic recognition to East Germany) and Ghana, had led to the general conclusion that these countries would do no more than recognise consular representation from the Soviet zone régime. Representatives of the

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Commonwealth African countries had thought that this would be the general policy of those attending the Cairo Conference; it was interesting to note that this also appeared to be the intention of Tanganyika and Zanzibar, where there had been considerable East German penetration. The United Kingdom Government would use its influence to try to prevent any further recognition of the Soviet zone régime, at any rate among Commonwealth countries, and Mr. Butler believed that they would be successful.

Mr. Butler then drew attention to the appointment of Mr. Zorin as U.S.S.R. representative to the Geneva Disarmament Conference and wondered whether this signified that the Russians were prepared to adopt a more constructive attitude on disarmament than hitherto. The only interesting contribution made by Mr. Zorin at Geneva in the last few weeks had been to recognise that it might be possible to reach agreement on the non-dissemination of nuclear power despite the eventual creation of a multilateral nuclear force. This suggested that a non-dissemination agreement was at least worth discussing with the Russians. Mr. Butler thanked Mr. Luns for giving him a copy of the memorandum handed to the Soviet Government on the subject of the multilateral nuclear force and non-dissemination of nuclear power. The British Government shared the view that the creation of the M.L.F. would not lead to nuclear dissemination. In general, however, the Disarmament Conference at Geneva had made very little progress.

Turning to the recent Soviet memorandum on United Nations peace-keeping operations, Mr. Butler, on examination, said that he had found this document to constitute an attempt to outflank the West rather than an effort to reach a compromise of any sort. The British Government had tried to approach the Soviets with a view to working out a compromise over the problem of peace-keeping finance which, unless it could be solved, would face the forthcoming session of the General Assembly with a crisis over the application of Article 19 of the Charter to the U.S.S.R. and other States in arrears with their contributions. The most striking feature of the Soviet memorandum, which appeared to be their final reply to the proposals of the United States and the United Kingdom, was the omission of any reference to the subject of arrears. It contained one or two constructive proposals; but the main purpose was to retain the task of peace-keeping under the control of the Security Council, thus frustrating the "uniting for peace" procedure. Mr. Butler thought that the Russians were hoping by this document in some way to improve their standing in the eyes of the Afro-Asian nations and at the same time to obscure the issues arising under Article 19 of the Charter.

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The inclusion in the memorandum of proposals for economic action against South Africa and Portugal was probably the reason why a certain amount of Afro-Asian support had been obtained for it; indeed, the experience of the recent Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference in London had shown that there was no subject more likely to elicit the enthusiastic backing of the Afro-Asian bloc. In fact the memorandum contained no suggestions which had not previously been put forward by the Soviet Union, and unless the West made its shortcomings quite clear to its other recipients and ensured that they were not misled by its apparently constructive aspects, it was to be feared that the future discussion of peace-keeping finance would take place on the basis of the Soviet rather than the Western proposals.

Mr. Butler then mentioned the Sino-Soviet conflict, which still appeared to be the main problem facing the U.S.S.R. The Russians were pursuing their objective of summoning a world conference of Communist parties, in which the Polish Communists appeared to show some willingness to take part but which was still very strongly opposed by the Rumanian, Yugoslav and Italian Communists, and of course by the supporters of China.

Commenting on Mr. Carstens' remarks concerning the relations between the Federal Republic and Eastern Europe, Mr. Butler thought that the Rumanians' assertion of independence was clearly regarded by the Russians as a threat to the long-term stability of the Soviet position in the area; it was noticeable that Russian propaganda had begun to treat nationalism as the main danger to the Soviet camp. The Rumanian attitude had shown that adherence to Communist doctrines did not necessarily imply a community of purpose, also that in present conditions the Russians were either unable or unwilling to compel obedience. Tendencies similar to those in Yugoslavia could also be seen in other Eastern European countries and the West must now consider how best to take advantage of them. It did not seem desirable openly to promote discord between the Soviet Union and these countries, a course which might prove self-defeating, but rather to adopt a flexible policy. The United Kingdom were trying to develop closer relations through trade, tourism, cultural exchanges and the like, and had furthermore raised the status of their Ministers in Eastern European countries to that of Ambassador. He welcomed the fact that the Federal Republic had adopted a similar policy.

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Mr. Butler then outlined the subjects which he hoped to discuss with Mr. Khrushchev during his forthcoming visit. On the question of German reunification (and, in this respect, he had been most interested by the account of Mr. Khrushchev's conversation with the Danish Prime Minister), he would make it clear that any attempt to breach the unity of the West would have no chance of success. Besides a number of purely Anglo-Soviet issues, involving a consular convention and other such matters, Mr. Butler hoped that his talks would cover all major aspects of East-West relations, particularly the disarmament question and, in his capacity as co-chairman under the Geneva Agreement with the Soviet Foreign Minister, the position of Indo-China; in this respect the recent Polish proposal concerning Laos might not have led to agreement by the time of his visit, and in that case Mr. Butler would negotiate with Mr. Gromyko to try to bring about a preliminary conference in some capital convenient to the countries concerned. Mr. Butler would return to this question at a later stage in the present consultations. He also hoped to put to the Russian leaders the United Kingdom point of view regarding peace-keeping and the Soviet memorandum.

Finally, Mr. Butler intended, while keeping strictly within the limits of policies agreed between members of the NATO Alliance, to discuss any other subjects on which it might be possible to make progress. He would report back to the Allies on the results of his talks.

Mr. CARSTENS thanked Mr. Butler for the information he had given on his conversations at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference, which corresponded with his Government's own wishes regarding the need to prevent recognition of the Pankow régime by the neutral countries of Asia and Africa. It was true that some of these, such as Ceylon and Zanzibar, had admitted East German consulates into their territories, and the German Minister proposed to return to the case of Zanzibar during the consultations on Africa. So far as Asian countries were concerned, the Federal Government were hoping to persuade them to refrain from establishing consular relations and contacts with the Soviet zone of occupation, because experience had shown that this régime always sought to achieve further recognition by this means and that its consular representatives tried to exceed the functions appertaining to their posts.

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M. COUVE de MURVILLE said that the French delegation's analysis of the Treaty of 12th June 1964 coincided almost exactly with that of the German delegation. This Treaty was a kind of substitute for the peace treaty which the Russians had finally decided not to conclude with the Soviet Zone. It sought to reconcile two apparently contradictory tendencies; first to do nothing which might worsen the position between the Western Powers and Russia and, secondly, to maintain very strictly Russia's attitude to Germany, as accurately stated by Mr. Carstens and confirmed by all conversations which had taken place between Russia and the Western Powers since the Treaty had been signed, namely, the division of Germany into three parts and the prospect of reunification exclusively by agreement between the Federal Republic and the G.D.R. or in other words recognition of the status quo as the only peaceful solution of the German problem. Here there was clearly a basic contradiction in Soviet policy. The Russians were seeking a relaxation of tension but the German problem remained and the Soviet attitude in this respect was itself an obstacle to relaxation. Attempts to improve the position were confined to peripheral questions which in practice never led very far because they had no real substance.

Apart from this, relations between the U.S.S.R. and the West had entered a period of stabilisation, if not genuine détente, which seemed to rule out any possibility of real conflict. The U.S.S.R. was in fact faced with other fundamental problems, such as relations with China and the satellite countries and these were likely to dominate the international situation for a long time. The new emergent trends were a sign of major upheavals within the Communist world, and the French Government's view was that such developments should not be hindered in any way. The new state of relations between Russia and China and the fact that former satellites were slowly recovering a measure of independence from Soviet policy seemed to be in the general interest of the West and, to a large extent, represented a return to normal which should be encouraged. It therefore appeared important not to isolate China and to develop relations with the Eastern European countries. Under this heading M. Couve de Murville referred particularly to the forthcoming visit of the Rumanian Prime Minister to Paris.

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Turning to the multilateral nuclear force, previously discussed in this connection, the Minister recalled that his Government was still not clear as to the purpose of the operation and was not taking part in the relevant discussions. It appeared that the United States intended to retain absolute control over the use of the nuclear force and to prevent the danger of dissemination. On the other hand, the U.S.S.R. feared that once such a force was established one or other of the participating countries might employ it as a means to obtain a measure of freedom in using nuclear weapons and that was why the Russians opposed it so strenuously, adopting what appeared to be an immovable attitude.

The representative of the Federal Republic had spoken of the special problems connected with recognition of the so-called "German Democratic Republic" and the French Government had frequently discussed these matters with Bonn. The possibility of a request from the G.D.R. to send an observer to the United Nations had been mentioned but it would perhaps be better to wait until such a request was submitted before discussing how the matter should be handled.

Finally, as regards the Conference in progress at Cairo and the Conference of neutral countries planned for October, concerning which Mr. Carstens had expressed his Government's anxiety, M. Couve de Murville observed that these points were at present being examined in Washington by United States, British and French representatives. Diplomatic action already initiated appeared adequate for the moment, but the question might be brought up again either within the same group or in NATO if more approaches seemed necessary.

Referring to relations with Eastern countries, Mr. LUNS said that the Rumanian Minister to The Hague had expressed his Government's desire for the development of fuller relations with the Netherlands in all fields.

The CHAIRMAN concluded by stressing the value of the exchange of views which had taken place on this point.

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