

Extract from minutes of the 316th meeting of the WEU Council held at ministerial level (Rome, 4–5 April 1967)

Caption: At the 316th meeting of the Council of Western European Union (WEU), held at ministerial level on 4 and 5 April 1967 in Rome, the delegations discuss the development of East–West relations. British Foreign Secretary George Brown and the General Secretary of the French Foreign Ministry, Hervé Alphand, consider that Western policy towards the Eastern bloc should not be allowed to lead to any relaxation of Western countries solidarity. Hervé Alphand emphasises France’s continued efforts to achieve a policy of détente, entente and cooperation with regard to the countries of Eastern Europe. George Brown notes the British Government’s intention to negotiate a treaty of friendship and peaceful cooperation with the Soviet Union and points out that a conference on European security could be useful as long as it is properly prepared. WEU seems to be an appropriate forum for bilateral talks on such a conference, provided the governments maintain close contact with each other.

Source: Council of the Western European Union. Extract from minutes of 316th meeting of WEU Council held at ministerial level in Rome on 4th and 5th April 1967. II. Political Consultation. CR (67) 7. Part I. pp. [s.p.]; 15-19; 29-31. 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: 1966, 01/03/1966-30/11/1970. File 132.15. Volume 2/7.

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FILE No :

EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF 316th MEETING

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OF W.E.U. COUNCIL HELD ~~ON~~ AT MINISTERIAL
LEVEL IN ROME ON 4th + 5th APRIL 1967

Chairman: M. FANFANI, ^{Italian} Minister for Foreign Affairs

II. POLITICAL CONSULTATION

1. East/West relations

The CHAIRMAN said that in accordance with the suggestions made at the Permanent Council, this heading would cover the recent visit of Mr. Podgorny to Rome, Germany's relations with the countries of Eastern Europe, the follow-up of the visits of MM. Kosygin and Rapacki to London, the recent Polish and Rumanian missions to Brussels, and the plan for an Inter-Parliamentary Conference to be held in Brussels.

At the invitation of the Chairman, M. LUPIS said that the main feature of East/West relations, particularly in Europe, was that both sides were experimenting - no doubt for different reasons - with broader policies and seeking to extend the dialogue and develop bilateral contacts with due respect to existing alliances and their attendant limitations. This process was, of course, subject to the overriding need to maintain a balance of forces, without which international tension could not safely be relaxed.

The Russians were naturally seeking to keep this development within well-defined limits, using it to consolidate the existing political and territorial structure of central Europe and endeavouring at the same time to change the relative strengths of forces on the continent in their favour.

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would not be sufficient - the allies needed to have a common political approach. He was convinced that a policy of détente called for concrete objectives for negotiation, going far beyond a straightforward confrontation of military alliances. Without wishing to dwell on the point, he felt that he must make his position plain: one could not help being struck, when considering the agenda for the Council of Ministers and the preparatory work that had preceded it, by the gap that existed between real needs and the subjects actually discussed. Unless the Council of Ministers made greater efforts in the near future, it would achieve nothing decisive. The German Government held that the initiative for a common European policy could only come from the Europeans themselves. Apologising for having added a number of general comments to his survey of relations between Germany and Eastern Europe, Mr. Brandt said he might want to come back to the matter of the conference on European security later in the discussion.

Mr. BROWN pointed out that a new situation had been reached in East/West relations and the factors should be calmly analysed. These were many, but unquestionably the most dramatic was the deterioration in Sino-Soviet relations. The Soviet leaders entered the fiftieth anniversary of the Revolution with major problems both in Asia and in Eastern Europe. Mr. Kosygin, on his recent trip to Britain, had denounced Chinese communism in no uncertain terms and it was doubtful whether the Sino-Soviet dispute could be resolved in the foreseeable future, especially while Chairman Mao remained in power. This situation had not, however, prevented Russia from playing her hand strongly in Europe during the last few months, during which time she had consistently attacked Western Germany, calling in question the bona fides of the new Government of the Federal Republic and stepping up well-known propaganda themes. Attempts had been made to brand the Federal Government's policy of improving relations with Eastern Europe as a means of isolating Eastern Germany, and the remarks of Mr. Brandt in this connection were exact and needed constant repetition. Mr. Brown, during his talks with Mr. Kosygin and Mr. Rapacki, had stressed

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the genuineness of the Federal Republic's desire to improve relations with Eastern Europe and had told them that what was needed for a real improvement in East/West relations was a constructive response on the part of the Warsaw Pact countries. So far, however, the response had been of the "cold-war" type and a great disappointment to those who were looking for a different relationship. Another element of Russian diplomacy, had been continued attempts at wedge-driving. This had its most distinctive form in trying to isolate the United States from her European allies; it was very apparent during Mr. Kosygin's visit to Britain. This tactic had conflicted, interestingly enough, with a Russian desire to use British contacts with Washington to help them over other troubles, particularly Vietnam. This wedge-driving tactic was not, of course, aimed at Britain alone, but there were these conflicting Russian objectives which were causing them much hard thought. This, therefore, was a time when the West, while giving nothing away and standing firm, nevertheless also had some thinking to do in order to turn to its own advantage a situation which did not offer as many advantages for Russia as it seemed to do a few years previously.

The moral responsibility of all Western Governments must be, first of all, to retain Western unity, and this in Western European Union and in the Atlantic Alliance. To disrupt this at the present time would be to throw away just about the strongest card the West had to play at the very moment when it was most essential that it should be seen to be held in the Western pack.

The British Government believed that the Soviet Union sought a new relationship with the West, because they were obliged to. This then was the new situation which was evolving in East/West relations, and, as the German Foreign Minister had said, the institutions of unity in the West, which had been set up for other reasons, had now taken on a very important role as the instruments that could be used to achieve a real détente. These institutions could provide the framework in which the essential consultations leading to détente could take place. Every kind of bilateral contact should be used to supplement the activities of these institutions, in order to lay the foundations

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for improved relations, but they could not replace the essential role which these institutions could play. The visits of Mr. Kosygin and Mr. Rapacki to Britain fell into that category, as did Mr. Brown's own visit to Moscow in May and the extensive round of ministerial consultations which the British Government was planning to have with the various countries of Eastern Europe. The Permanent Council of W.E.U. had already received a report on Mr. Kosygin's visit and the British intention to negotiate a treaty of "Friendship and Peaceful Co-operation" with the Soviet Union had been discussed in NATO. The Foreign Secretary emphasised that this treaty, if successfully concluded, would in no way affect British commitments, obligations or attachments to the Atlantic Alliance, and would serve as a framework for bilateral co-operation. It was thus aligned with the proposed British Declaration on Europe which had already been discussed with her allies. Close touch would be kept with all member countries as the discussions with the Russians on this proposed treaty proceeded.

The talks with the Polish delegation, led by Mr. Rapacki, had also been held in a very friendly atmosphere. They had deliberately aimed at informality and there had therefore been no formal communiqué at the end of the talks. Mr. Rapacki had been very ready to talk frankly on all issues including those on which very divergent views were held, such as Germany. The Polish attitude towards Germany remained very hard. He had been prepared to concede that views expressed by the new German Government were encouraging, but, when pressed on this point, merely said that they had not been translated into action. This topic of conversation had been exceedingly difficult. The British Government, nevertheless, wished to congratulate the German Government on the progress it was now making, in the face of much discouragement, in developing her relations with Eastern Europe. This progress clearly worried the Poles, as Mr. Brandt had just recognised, since they feared that they, like the East Germans, might, in such a situation, be left out in the cold. Their obsession with Germany appeared to make it impossible for them to take the necessary steps to improve their relations with Bonn. This attitude, as Mr. Brandt had said, was in contrast to the views of other East European countries, notably Rumania, but not Rumania alone. These differences, although an impediment as far as

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Western efforts at progress in this direction were concerned, were illustrative of the new situation evolving in Eastern Europe in which the members of the Warsaw Pact were beginning to think of their own problems and, within limits, were beginning to feel able to act independently of the Soviet Union. This was a factor which the West must take into account in deciding how to act at this time. The Foreign Secretary had told Mr. Rapacki that this was a moment of great opportunity for improving German-Polish relationships and that the British Government strongly favoured such a course of action. European security had been discussed at length with the Polish representatives, as with the Russians. Mr. Brown had accepted, and he hoped that the Council would agree, that a European security conference could be useful, provided the way was prepared adequately enough. Ideas had differed, however, on what constituted an adequate preparation. Mr. Rapacki thought that a conference should concentrate first on measures of disarmament in Europe and on other acts which he regarded as necessary to European security. By this he meant the confirmation of existing boundaries and some measure of recognition of Eastern Germany. Major questions, such as German reunification, he preferred to leave until a later stage. Mr. Brown had expressed the view, as he had done to the Russians, that if such a conference was to achieve anything worthwhile, then these major political questions must be dealt with at the conference and the preparatory work must be directed to enabling the conference to deal with them. Ideas had also differed considerably on the question of American participation in such a conference. Mr. Brown had taken the view, both with Mr. Kosygin and subsequently with Mr. Rapacki, that there must be American participation if it was to be at all useful and worthwhile. The Poles were now clearly less keen than hitherto, due perhaps to the Vietnamese situation and they had been unwilling to commit themselves. The Russians too had been, to say the least, ambiguous about it. American participation, however, remained essential and the Western powers should make this clear to both countries at their various talks. Discussions on a European security conference could be conducted through a complex of bilateral conversations and W.E.U. was the obvious

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forum, provided governments maintained close contact with each other and ensured that what was said bilaterally did not at any stage contradict itself or conflict with the general aim.

It might be some time before this aspect of the present détente could be carried to the point where Western and Eastern European countries could sit down together and discuss the whole problem. The sooner the United Kingdom was a member of the European Economic Community and brought other countries with her, and the divisions in Western Europe were eased if not ended, the sooner would Western Europe be able to talk to Eastern Europe in a meaningful way. By bringing this desirable situation about, Western strength, power and influence would be increased. No matter how long it might take to get Eastern and Western European countries round the same table, one thing was abundantly clear. Western interests lay in the continued preservation of the security system established some two decades previously and which had held the peace in Europe for a longer period than that managed between the first and second World Wars. This system, established in the West by means of the Atlantic Alliance and W.E.U., was no barrier to détente. On the contrary, it could be the bridge to détente and to the ending of the division of Europe. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that this same system had, in fact, created a new situation in history. As M. Spaak had recently said: Europe was the quietest of the continents, the most peaceful and the most sure of herself. There was a lot of wisdom in those words and much of the reason for the wisdom was in this system.

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M. ALPHAND, after thanking the Chairman for his words of welcome, said that he had no intention of repeating what previous heads of the French delegation to the Council had said regarding France's continued efforts, over the past months, to achieve that collective result which the President of the Republic had summarised in three words - détente, entente and co-operation. General de Gaulle had journeyed to the Soviet Union and the Minister for Foreign Affairs had visited almost all the countries of Eastern Europe. Since then the French Government had received a large number of representatives from these states, the most recent being Mr. Rapacki; the latter's visit had taken place from 26th to 28th January 1967, which was after the accession to power of the Government in which Mr. Brandt was Vice-Chancellor. Those who had spoken with Mr. Rapacki in Paris had had an opportunity of invoking this policy of détente, entente and co-operation; as Chancellor Kiesinger and Mr. Brandt had been informed, they had set out to prove the existence of an entirely new trend within the German Government, taking the form of an endeavour to find a new basis for peace in Europe. They stressed that this policy was not confined to intentions or mere gestures; it was already taking shape with the establishment of diplomatic relations with Rumania and approaches to a considerable number of other countries in Eastern Europe.

As Mr. Brown had said to his Soviet colleagues, the French Government had stated their belief in the goodwill and sincerity of the Government in Bonn in pursuing this policy, although Mr. Rapacki may not have been entirely convinced. The latter maintained that the change was merely one of tone, not of substance, and that three important problems remained outstanding - nuclear weapons, frontiers and the general attitude of the Federal German Government towards East Germany. In this connection, Mr. Rapacki did not define his position nor formulate any precise demands, but only noted the progress of political, and possibly economic, relations between the Bonn Government and Pankow. Mr. Rapacki had added that Poland was in no way opposed to the establishment of diplomatic relations between the German Government and other socialist republics.

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All this seemed to point to a certain change in previous attitudes, so that the German Government had no need to feel too disappointed. This was a long-term affair, as Mr. Brandt himself had observed many times. The Vice-Chancellor had said that the reason why the Russians had offered so little encouragement to the policy followed by his Government might well be that they were hoping thereby to create a breach between Germany and her Western neighbours. Personally, M. Alphand did not believe this was so. After listening to the previous speakers he was convinced everyone would agree that the only way to achieve a firm basis for peace in a truly united Europe lay in pursuing a policy of détente, entente and co-operation, through concerted action, even if the actual approach were bilateral. The Soviet reaction might be attributable to the influence of Mr. Ulbricht and to East Germany's fears of seeing the policy of détente succeed. However this might be, French and German aims in this field were identical; they were known to all and, in the light of what had been said, they were very closely in line with those of all the other governments of W.E.U., nor did they differ very much from those of the United States.

The second subject dealt with in the Rapacki talks was that of European security and the possibility of a conference on the subject. The Poles had expressed interest in the scheme, without however considering that there was any urgency. On the French side, it was pointed out that such a conference could only take place if two outstanding problems were first resolved: firstly, which Germany should be asked to attend? Secondly - and this had been referred to by Mr. Brown - should a conference of this kind include countries from outside Europe, however friendly the esteem in which they were held and whatever the nature of their commitments on the European continent?

Finally, the conversations turned to Vietnam and a considerable similarity of views was found to exist between the French and Polish Governments on this problem.

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Concluding his statement, M. Alphand agreed with the United Kingdom Representative that Western policy towards the East should not be allowed to lead to any relaxation of Western solidarity. He did not think that there was any risk of Germany's becoming isolated through an excess of bilateralism. In this particular sphere all the governments represented on the Council were pursuing the same policy designed to ensure, on a stable basis and over a long period, peace in Europe.

Also thanking the Chairman for his welcome, M. GREGOIRE said that he had the interests of W.E.U. at heart and was glad to be taking part in the Council's discussions. He would like to refer briefly to Mr. Luns' remarks. He endorsed his colleague's warning, because the West seemed to be moving into a somewhat equivocal and possibly contradictory position. If the intention were really to follow the line suggested by the French delegation, who had spoken of agreement, détente and co-operation, these stages should not be regarded as fairly wide apart but rather as fairly close together in time. Indeed, agreement, détente and co-operation might be simultaneous but co-operation would then have to be better concerted. Action was proceeding along many different lines, all with the same praiseworthy objective of unifying Europe and ensuring its security. While welcoming such action, M. Grégoire thought that too much should not be attempted at the same time for fear of losing sight of essentials. He therefore agreed with Mr. Luns that it would be dangerous to place too much reliance on bilateral moves.

Mr. BRANDT wished to comment on the Belgian proposal for a European inter-parliamentary conference. The German Government favoured such a meeting on the agreed conditions. They could not allow the Communist part of Germany to attend and vote, as that would be contrary to the policy agreed jointly by the Federal Republic of Germany with her allies. Regarding the

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