

Extract from minutes of the 538th meeting of the WEU Council held at ministerial level (Bonn, 5 June 1978)

Caption: At the 538th meeting of the Council of Western European Union (WEU), held at ministerial level on 5 June 1978 in Bonn, the delegations discuss the development of East–West relations. British representative John Tomlinson and Olivier Stirn, French State Secretary to the Foreign Minister, note that bilateral relations with the countries of Eastern Europe are moving in the right direction. The French representative mentions that some progress has been made in the SALT talks but points out that the Soviet Union has also undertaken a series of actions that are likely to harm détente. The Soviets have delivered significant quantities of arms to Africa, increased their offensive military capacities directed at Europe and failed to comply with the provisions of the Helsinki Final Act in the area of human rights. Olivier Stirn nevertheless affirms that détente should remain a constant factor in Western policy.

Source: Council of the Western European Union. Extract from minutes of 538th meeting of WEU Council held at ministerial level on 5th June 1978 in Bonn. II. Bilateral East-West relations. CR (78) 6. pp. [s.p.]; 10-12; 17-20; 8 p. 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: 1975, 01/02/1975-30/12/1982. File 132.15. Volume 5/7.

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EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF 538^H MEETING
OF W.E.U. COUNCIL HELD ~~ON~~ AT MINISTERIAL
LEVEL ON 5TH JUNE 1978 IN BONN

FILE NO.
CR (78) 6

Chairman: Dr. Hildegard Hamm-Brücher,
Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign
Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany.

II. BILATERAL EAST-WEST RELATIONS

Observing that the multilateral side of East-West relations was dealt with elsewhere, the CHAIRMAN suggested that, as leader of the German delegation, she might first make some general comments on the development of inner-German relations, on relations with the Soviet Union, and with the eastern European states, before asking delegations for their views. Following these, she intended asking Dr. Klaus Blech, Director of Political Affairs at the German Foreign Ministry, to give a special and more detailed account of the results of the recent visit to Bonn by the Soviet President and Party Secretary, Mr. Brezhnev.

It was so agreed.

SECRET

SECRET

- 10 -

W.E.U. SECRET

CR (78) 6

Cultural and scientific relations were developing satisfactorily overall, though the opportunities in these fields had not yet been exhausted. In the field of bringing families together, progress had been made.

M. STIRN wished to offer a few remarks along much the same lines as Mrs. Hamm-Brücher.

The French Government noted that détente was still the frame of reference for East-West relations, and welcomed the declarations that had been made in favour of détente, particularly during the visits of Mr. Husak and Mr. Brezhnev to the Federal Republic of Germany. In the same spirit, his Government had noted that some progress had been made at the SALT talks, accompanied however by a deterioration in the climate of relations between Washington and Moscow over the last few weeks. The fact remained that détente must continue to be the reference point for relations between East and West, and this was the first comment the French Minister wished to make.

His second comment, slightly qualifying the first, was that it must be recognised that over the past few months, Cuba and the Soviet Union had undertaken a series of actions that were likely to harm détente and could not fail to arouse disquiet; they had not hesitated, notably in Africa, to commit impressive quantities of arms and numbers of technical and military experts and even, in the case of Cuba, combatant personnel. The French Government had also recorded, three days previously in Chad, after the violent incident there, the presence of very large quantities of up-to-date weapons of Soviet origin; this confirmed the comments just made, and had justified certain reactions.

Likewise, there was good reason to wonder what objective was being pursued by the Soviet Union and the countries of the East with the constant increase - comparatively greater, incidentally, than in the days of the Cold War - in their offensive military capability, directed mainly towards western Europe.

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W.E.U. SECRET

SECRET

SECRET

- 11 -

W.E.U. SECRET

CR (78) 6

The epilogue to the Belgrade Conference had shown that, though the Russians might have made concessions when the Helsinki Final Act was being drafted, they were not willing to accept this document as a code of human rights to which they should conform in their actions. The Yuri Orlov trial and the sentence passed on him were proof of that; the French Government had sent an official note of protest at the time.

The speaker's third comment, stemming from the previous two, was that the West must therefore be vigilant, and must also provide itself with powerful safeguards. It was only with the protection of adequate defences that they could promote détente, between states and on an individual scale. This was the only way of establishing a real climate of confidence and co-operation between the countries of the West and East.

Fourthly, M. Stirn said that it was with these objectives in mind that France was seeking to pursue the political dialogue that had been started with all the countries of the East, to develop co-operation with them in every sphere, and, so far as possible, to increase confidence and contact between people. Détente remained, therefore, a constant factor in French policy.

As to bilateral relations, these would, starting with the Soviet Union, be marked by M. Deniau's visit to Moscow during the coming summer, and the meeting of the main committee in Paris in the early autumn. The French Government was also expecting Mr. Gromyko to come to Paris before the end of the year, as well as a visit by Marshal Ogarkov, which had been planned for June but had been put off at his request.

There was a continuing dialogue, too, with all the countries of the East. M. Stirn would be going to Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia at the end of that week. Mr. Andrei, the Romanian Foreign Minister, would be visiting France in June and would be

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W.E.U. SECRET

SECRET

SECRET

- 12 -

W.E.U. SECRET

CR (78) 6

followed in a few weeks' time by the Polish Foreign Minister, Mr. Wojtaszek; it was probable, too, that Mr. Kadar would make an official visit before the end of the year. Mr. Mittag, Secretary of the SED Central Committee, would come to Paris from 5th to 8th June, and M. Stirn would be going to East Berlin in July. The French Government was thus intending to pursue consultations with all the countries of the East, with a view to implementation of the provisions of the Helsinki Final Act.

M. RADI said that in reviewing the main developments in Italy's relations with eastern countries, he wished to stress the continuity of the line taken by the Italian Government in helping to further the normalisation of East-West relations, despite renewed obstacles. In this context, the international events which, in recent months, had seemed to have most influenced East-West relations - such as, for example, the outcome of the Belgrade Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, the delicate stage reached in the Soviet-American dialogue and its connection, however indirect, with the crises associated with fighting in various parts of the world - particularly in Africa, as the French delegate had mentioned - and the repercussions of the most recent Soviet actions in the sensitive area of personal liberty - had considerably added to the uncertainties which, in 1977, were already affecting the process of détente. Against this background, Italy had tried to further the normalisation of East-West relations in various ways.

In September 1977, a meeting had taken place in New York between the Foreign Minister, M. Forlani, and the Soviet Foreign Minister, who had reviewed the main aspects of East-West relations and had stated their respective views. During the regular political consultations between the two Foreign Ministries, the main current international issues had also been reviewed. Finally, a large number of visits had been exchanged between Ministers in charge of technical departments in Italy and the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics.

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W.E.U. SECRET

SECRET

Mr. TOMLINSON believed that it was fairly difficult at this point in time for the Council to hold a discussion concerning East-West relations when virtually all their Prime Ministers, Foreign Ministers and Defence Ministers had very recently been meeting in Washington for the NATO meeting of Heads of Government, and their views had been subject to considerable publicity through the texts of their speeches, communiqués and press conferences.

Concerning the Soviet Union, since the last meeting of the Council in April 1977, Anglo-Soviet relations had continued to develop in many fields but, in recent months, had been affected by some of the larger uncertainties governing East-West relations in general. Dr. Owen's visit to Moscow in October 1977 had been the occasion of useful discussions with the Soviet leadership on international questions, and Mr. Gromyko was expected to visit the United Kingdom later this year. An invitation to President Brezhnev to visit the United Kingdom was formally on the table, although it was not expected to be taken up this year.

There were, at present, no major purely bilateral problems between the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union. Trade, to which the United Kingdom attached a high priority, had developed fairly encouragingly recently and the Anglo-Soviet Joint Commission for Trade and Scientific Relations had met in London on 23rd to 25th May, in what was described as a constructive and business-like atmosphere. During his visit, the leader of the Soviet delegation, the Soviet Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Kirillin, had met the Prime Minister, Mr. Callaghan, and other British Ministers; and the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, Dr. Owen, had also had a meeting in New York at the end of last week with the Soviet Foreign Minister, Mr. Gromyko.

The main differences between the two countries had been a consequence of the wider issues affecting relations between East and West generally. The extent and nature of Soviet and Cuban involvement in the Horn of Africa, and uncertainty about developments in Eritrea and elsewhere in Africa, had affected public confidence in the détente process.

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SECRET

-- 18 --

W.E.U. SECRET

CR (78) 6

The Soviet Union's determination to adopt a hard line towards dissent, even where, in the case of Mr. Orlov, activities were based firmly on the Helsinki Final Act itself, had evoked a very sharp reaction indeed from British public opinion. This had had its effect on the C.S.C.E. process and détente, which was reflected in the temperature of bilateral relations.

The United Kingdom had noted signs of the Russians' extreme sensitivity towards relations of western countries with China. They had, for example, reacted very sharply to certain statements made by the British Chief of Defence Staff during his recent visit to Peking. And the Soviet Chargé d'affaires in London had recently delivered a message warning against the adoption, by the W.E.U. Assembly, of a draft Recommendation calling for closer relations and, in particular, military co-operation with China, which he described as a demonstration of collective hostility towards the Soviet Union and contrary to the Helsinki Final Act. In fact, as the Council well knew, the draft Recommendation did not call for such military co-operation.

Soviet actions in both Africa and in relation to Helsinki-monitoring groups were making it harder to develop a safe and constructive relationship with the Soviet Union. That remained the United Kingdom's aim, but the Government would also continue to ensure that the differences in western and Soviet conceptions of détente, and the concerns of British public opinion, were brought home to the Soviet Government.

On bilateral relations with the rest of eastern Europe, 1977 had been a year of consolidation in Anglo-Polish relations after a particularly active year in 1976, and things were going relatively well. In addition to the inter-governmental contacts, the British Labour Party was developing exchanges with the Polish United Workers' Party and, in March this year, a member of the Politburo of the Polish United Workers' Party had visited the United Kingdom as a guest of the General Secretary of the Labour Party.

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W.E.U. SECRET

SECRET

SECRET

- 19 -

W.E.U. SECRET

CR (78) 6

Anglo-Hungarian relations were developing steadily, although over the past twelve months there had been no spectacular developments.

The Czechoslovakian Government's reaction to Charter 77, and their handling of political dissidents, continued to cast a serious shadow over the development of Anglo-Czech relationships. Public opinion in the United Kingdom was extremely sensitive about violations of human rights in Czechoslovakia, and this was imposing severe constraints on the Government's scope for improving relations and for responding to the Czech desire to raise the level of political exchanges. Consequently, there had been no political exchanges at ministerial level since the Czech Foreign Minister, Mr. Chnoupek, had visited London in September 1976.

The British Government's relations with Romania were very good and President Ceausescu would be making a state visit to Britain in June. A number of ministerial visits had taken place in each direction, and the Romanian Government had recently shown willingness to settle some of the outstanding personal cases involving British nationals who wished to marry Romanians, and Romanians who wished to visit the United Kingdom or join friends or relatives. It was hoped that the outstanding personal cases would be settled before the state visit. Generally, however, Romania continued to adopt a very restrictive attitude towards travel to the West by its nationals for personal or professional reasons, which had sometimes had a detrimental effect on the cultural exchange programme.

Relations with Yugoslavia were very good. In the past year, there had been a number of useful ministerial visits in both directions, and the United Kingdom Government saw substantial advantage in maintaining and developing Yugoslavia's links with the West wherever possible. That country had expressed particular concern over its growing trade imbalance with the West, and the United Kingdom Government, for its part, hoped that something could be done to help them over this, for example, in the current negotiations with the European Economic Community. It was also considered useful to keep in touch with the Yugoslavs on such issues as world economic problems and disarmament, on which they obviously exercised an important influence for moderation in the non-aligned movement.

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W.E.U. SECRET

SECRET

SECRET

- 20 -

W.E.U. SECRET

CR (78) 6

Relations with the German Democratic Republic had developed in step with those of the United Kingdom's allies, and were now on the same footing as relations with other eastern European countries. There had been a number of visits both ways over the past year and, in February this year, an inter-parliamentary union delegation from the United Kingdom had paid an extremely successful visit to the G.D.R.

Finally, in connection with the C.S.C.E., the most important current problem was to evolve a policy which would both carry western public opinion with governments at a time when Soviet actions such as the trial of Mr. Orlov were causing deep concern and outrage, and yet, at the same time, encourage eastern readiness to develop the C.S.C.E. follow-up process rather more whole-heartedly in future. Western countries would, Mr. Tomlinson believed, need to continue to take a strong line on the necessity for eastern countries to maintain and to improve their performance in future. At the same time, they should make it clear that their interest was not confined exclusively to the humanitarian aspects of the Final Act. Wherever the Final Act was relevant in the sphere of economic, technical, environmental, cultural and educational co-operation, it should also be invoked. In addition, western countries could usefully pursue points of bilateral interest to them directly with the eastern European countries concerned. But they should make every endeavour, through meetings such as this and through their own bilateral contacts, to keep their partners and allies informed, and consulting with them wherever necessary.

Observing that delegations had no further comments, the CHAIRMAN then invited Dr. Blech to report to the Ministerial Council on Mr. Brezhnev's visit to Bonn.

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/Dr. BLECH remarked ...

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