

## Extract from minutes of the 281st meeting of the WEU Council held at ministerial level (The Hague, 4 November 1965)

**Caption:** At the 281st meeting of the Council of Western European Union (WEU), held at ministerial level on 4 November 1965 in The Hague, the delegations discuss the development of East–West relations. British Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart states that it is difficult to assess the real intentions of the countries of Eastern Europe. With regard to the Soviet Union, he speaks about the USSR’s domestic problems, including economic and agricultural difficulties and the conflict with China. He feels that there is a real desire on the part of the countries of Eastern Europe to enter into talks with the West. But French State Secretary for Foreign Affairs Michel Habib-Deloncle points out that he can see no development in the policy adopted by the countries of Eastern Europe towards Germany. He also emphasises that there has been no progress in the talks on disarmament.

**Source:** [Conseil de l’Union de l’Europe occidentale. Extrait du compte rendu de la 281e réunion du Conseil de l’UEO (tenue au niveau ministériel) La Haye, 4 novembre 1965. II. Consultation politique. CR (65) 17.] pp. 8-10; 17-19. 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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W.E.U. SECRET

CR (65) 17

economic questions, with which the present regime was concerned, was the problem of how much power resided in the hands of people at the centre, who were trying to plan the economy, and how much in the hands of people in individual factories and enterprises, who were trying to study the market and the needs of the public. He recalled that, at the time of the drafting of the very first Constitution of the Soviet Union, there was a clause in it which prescribed that one of the duties of the Central Government was to create a proper system of accounting. In other words, they were trying to make sure that an economy in which nearly all the means of production were publicly owned and which was planned from the centre would, nonetheless, respond to what the public really wanted, and would in this way produce goods in the proportions in which they were needed. From that time onwards, however, this problem never really seemed to have been solved and the reforms which were now being considered seemed to be attempting once more to shift the balance of power away from the centre and towards those in charge of individual enterprises. The problem of agricultural production, aggravated recently by a bad harvest, was also exercising the Soviet Government which would sooner or later determine its policy on the collectivisation of agriculture. During his recent visit to Poland, the Secretary of State had discussed this question and had learnt that the Soviet Government had been critical of the small proportion of collectivised agriculture in that country. The Polish Government considered that this was because the Russians tended to look at the problem too theoretically and with too little regard for the practical needs of agriculture. The Soviet Government was also concerned with questions of cultural policy and what had been described as the unsatisfactory ideological attitudes of youth. One rather disquieting feature of this had been a campaign to try and improve the image of the Secret Police, but there certainly did not seem to be any sign of the return of the Secret Police to the kind of position they had occupied under Stalin's regime. The general picture, therefore, was of a Government still in a considerable state of uncertainty as to what its internal policies should be.

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W.E.U. SECRET

CR (65) 17

Secondly, with regard to the external policies of the Soviet Government, the dispute between the Soviet and Chinese Governments was of the greatest concern. Generally speaking, the Chinese Government seemed to enjoy the dispute and the Soviet Government to regret it, and it had looked recently as if the more cautious attitude of the Soviet Government had begun to pay the larger dividends. China appeared to have been losing support recently among Asian and African countries. Her over-aggressive propaganda in Africa had not paid off and, in Asia, her evident wish to inflame the Indo-Pakistan dispute had not been welcomed by a good many Asian countries. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, had wanted to prevent the Indo-Pakistan dispute from flaring up and seemed to prefer to avoid adopting a positive and definite attitude. This "laissez-faire" approach to international affairs illustrated by the view they took in the United Nations as to what should be the degree of authority of the Security Council and the General Assembly over peace-keeping, could be linked with a semi-Marxist view of historical inevitability and acceptance of the viewpoint that the tide of history does not make it necessary to adopt any very striking or constructive attitude towards the solving of any particular problems. Mr. Stewart felt that sooner or later the Soviet Union's disagreements with China would oblige her to consider getting on better terms with the West, although he did not think that she had reached that point yet. He looked forward to finding out, during his visit to Moscow at the end of November, a little more about the present Soviet attitude towards the West.

With regard to the smaller European countries, Mr. Stewart himself had recently been to Poland, Mr. Thomson, Minister of State, had visited Bulgaria and Rumania and Mr. Janos Peter, Foreign Minister of Hungary, had come to London. A general impression derived from these contacts was that there was a very real desire on the part of these smaller East European countries, except perhaps Rumania, to get into conversation with the West in order to increase trade and personal and cultural contacts and to exchange views with Western Governments about international affairs.

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W.E.U. SECRET

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W.E.U. SECRET

CR (65) 17

The Polish Government had been very preoccupied with the question of Central Europe and with its relations with Germany, and on this point the Secretary of State had stressed the importance that the British Government attached to the reunification of Germany. This was, of course, not a popular doctrine in Poland. The idea in theory was not rejected but they were ready at all times to find difficulties in any proposal that might lead to German reunification. A growing improvement of relations between the smaller countries of Eastern Europe and the Federal Republic of Germany was possible but it would obviously be a slow process requiring a good deal of patience. When Mr. Peter visited London, he had expressed anxiety about the Vietnam dispute. It seemed that several of the smaller Communist countries considered that a solution to the Vietnam question would remove one of the major obstacles towards a better understanding between the Soviet Union and the West and, since they themselves were anxious to make increasing contact with the West, they would be glad to see this particular obstacle out of the way. In Mr. Stewart's view, the West should continue to take every opportunity for contact, both with the Soviet Union and with the Eastern European countries. Rapid or striking changes in the situation could not be expected but, over a long period and with patience, there could be a relaxation of tension between Eastern and Western Europe.

The CHAIRMAN thanked Mr. Stewart for his interesting statement and gave the floor to the Italian representative.

M. LUPIS wished to comment briefly on the impressions gained during the recent State visit to Warsaw by the President of the Italian Republic. The President's visit had been made in the context of current Western policy in relation to the Eastern European countries. It was the common view of member Governments that this policy, which had been discussed several times before, should aim at the gradual and cautious development of economic and cultural relations with the Eastern European countries, making use of the limited possibilities offered by any independent attitudes emerging in those States. It was against this background that the State visit, during which views were exchanged on the main current problems, had provided a valuable opportunity for exploring the Polish leaders' ideas and comparing their positions with those of the Italian Government.

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W.E.U. SECRET

CR (65) 17

was also trying to create at least a modest means of bringing pressure to bear on those countries by neutralising the restrictions imposed on inter-zone trade in the event of a crisis in Berlin. Mr. Schroeder again stressed that, in the view of the Federal Republic of Germany, inter-zone trade was a political, and not an economic, question. This trade formed a useful link for economic relations between the two parts of Germany and was to some extent an additional insurance for the safety of Berlin. That was why the German Government was at great pains to explain its position on the subject. Western loans and the supply of Western capital goods to the zone must be set against this background. The German Government's efforts deserved support. The German public was following developments in this matter with the closest attention and their occasional sensitivity ought to be understood. There was a close connection between Germany's awareness of belonging to the West and the latter's clearly-defined attitude on questions concerning the Soviet-occupied zone. The German Government were therefore grateful for the understanding which had always been shown for German preoccupations in this respect. This understanding was also in the interests of other allied countries, just as the feeling of Western solidarity on vital questions was valuable for the joint security of the Western countries.

M. HABIB-DELONCLE said he would be brief, since his analysis of the situation overlapped to a great extent with those of previous speakers. In the first place, due regard should be paid to the importance for the Soviet Union of the dispute with China, which seemed to have become permanent. It had not perhaps been sufficiently recognised that Russia and the Eastern European countries were growing more acutely aware of the significance of relations between one State and another within the international context, in contrast to their more ideological approach of earlier years. Poland, Rumania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria were recovering their sense of national interests, which were often - but not always - linked with those of Soviet Russia; in this respect, the most far-reaching progress would appear to have been made by Rumania, which did not hesitate to invoke officially a principle, which was equally familiar to the French Government - that of national independence.

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CR (65) 17

The second conclusion to be drawn from the importance assumed by the dispute with China was the growing impression that the U.S.S.R. would be glad to seek some form of compensatory assurance through improved relations with the West, but that they were in many cases prevented from so doing, either because of the nature of the problems at issue or because of their reluctance to provide China too obviously with ammunition for denouncing such collusion with what the latter rightly or wrongly labelled Imperialism. This being so, the significance of the war in Vietnam was considerable, and it seemed likely that so long as it continued in the way it was going, not to mention any possible intensification of hostilities, the chances of any renewed thaw in Russo-American relations were extremely small, not to say nil.

It was true that the Soviet Union and the United States might still find themselves on the same side of the fence, together with the other permanent members of the Security Council, over specific issues such as the Kashmir affair; this should not, however, lead to any false hopes concerning the possibility of improving direct contacts. Nor was there any reason for much optimism concerning the outcome of the disarmament talks, since there again any Russo-American agreement which left out China was likely to be exploited by the latter and turned against the U.S.S.R., whereas any agreement which included China would come up against the very fact of the Vietnam war. Nevertheless, there appeared to be some anxiety in Russia, as in all the Eastern countries, over the problem of rearmament - in particular nuclear rearmament - and the French delegation could only confirm what had already been said regarding the fundamental hostility of those countries towards such concepts as the Multilateral Nuclear Force or the Atlantic Nuclear Force. They could also agree that there appeared to be no prospect of a change in policy among those countries towards Germany. Like the United Kingdom and Italy, France had maintained her position on the reunification of Germany and non-recognition of the Pankow regime.

There was a further point worth noting. In her anxiety to remain in contact with the West, and being unable to pursue this dialogue very far with the United States, the Soviet Union was more favourably disposed towards contacts with other Western States; not only was she seeking such contacts herself, but she could accept with better grace that those countries formerly called satellites should do so for themselves. This was a significant change in policy, in contrast to the situation of only a year ago. For the rest, official reports issued after the various meetings reflected what had been said with sufficient accuracy for it to be unnecessary to comment further.

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W.E.U. SECRET

CR (65) 17

Concluding, M. Habib-Deloncle expressed the view that the governments of Eastern countries had now embarked on a phase which clearly marked an advance over their former policy of immobilism. Insofar as these developments might lead to improved and more normal relations between the countries of East and West Europe, they should be welcomed with interest and a certain degree of optimism.

The CHAIRMAN, speaking as Netherlands delegate, observed that there had been a new development since the last Council meeting - the distinct loss of Chinese influence on the international chessboard, resulting in a corresponding improvement of the Soviet position, as had recently been noted in Algiers. So far as Russia was concerned, unlike what had occurred following the death of Stalin, no split had become visible in the ruling group after more than one year in power. Mr. Brezhnev appeared to occupy the leading position and his post as Secretary-General of the Communist Party gave him a certain advantage. As had been pointed out by other speakers, with whom the Netherlands delegation fully agreed, Russia was finding the Vietnam war a considerable embarrassment in her relations with European countries and the United States. It was clear that she was anxious to avoid a conflict with the latter but, having regard to the effects of her policy in other Communist countries and throughout all communist parties, she felt obliged to provide at least verbal support to Hanoi. The risk of war would therefore appear to have shifted from Europe to the Far East. The Netherlands hoped that the United States would succeed in establishing conditions in Vietnam which would allow of an honourable solution, because a victory for North Vietnam would have extremely serious results. However, it would appear from the talks which had taken place during Mr. Harriman's visit to the Soviet leaders that Russia was not in a position to persuade China to pursue a more moderate line or to negotiate a peace.

Finally, turning to the European scene, Mr. Luns wished to stress that the Netherlands saw little possibility of any true détente between the West and Russia so long as the present division of Germany persisted. A certain freedom of manoeuvre appeared to be developing, not only in countries such as Rumania, Poland and Czechoslovakia, but also under the Pankow regime. However, a solution of the problem of the division of Germany on a basis of self-determination remained decisive and here the Netherlands Government was in full agreement with the views put forward by the representatives of the Federal Republic of Germany and the United Kingdom.

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