

Extract from minutes of the 453rd meeting of the WEU Council held at ministerial level (Luxembourg, 15 February 1973)

Caption: At the 453rd meeting of the Council of Western European Union (WEU), held at ministerial level on 15 February 1973 in Luxembourg, the delegations discuss the development of East–West relations. André Bettencourt, French Minister attached to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, raises subjects including the latest meeting between Georges Pompidou and Leonid Brezhnev, at which the leaders had discussed the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and the negotiations on Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions in Central Europe (MBFR). While the Soviet Union had pressed for French participation in the MBFR negotiations, France had reaffirmed its position, namely opposition to the bloc-to-bloc system and to increased military imbalance in Central Europe, and President Pompidou had merely stated that there would be other opportunities for further discussion on the matter of MBFR. The British Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Anthony Royle, notes that preparations for the CSCE are going very well for the West and emphasises the importance of solidarity between the Western participants in the forthcoming MBFR negotiations.

Source: Council of the Western European Union. Extract from minutes of 453th meeting of WEU Council held at ministerial level on 15th February 1973 in Luxembourg. II. East-West Relations. CR (73) 3. pp. [s.p]; 23-24; 28-30. 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: 1971, 01/02/1971-30/03/1974. File 132.15. Volume 4/7.

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Chairman: M. THORN

II. EAST-WEST RELATIONS

31- GDR.

a) State of relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic

c) Relations with east European countries

Referring to the Franco-Soviet talks at Zaslavl, M. BETTENCOURT said the discussions between M. Pompidou and Mr. Brezhnev had been quite informal; this had been a working visit and it could be said that the atmosphere had been very good. Naturally, the fact that the two statesmen had already met on a number of occasions made discussion easier.

The C.S.C.E. had been the main subject of conversation on this occasion. The Russians had announced the two changes they intended making in their position, regarding, first, cultural affairs which, they agreed, should form a separate item on the agenda, and, secondly, measures to ensure trust, which they agreed to include in the programme of the commission responsible for security problems. In exchange for this move towards the French position, they had sought French support for their plan to set up a permanent body. They had been told that the French Government did not wish to express an opinion on this matter until the results of the Conference had emerged: the desirability of setting up permanent institutions to carry on their work should be considered in the light of the conclusions reached by each of the Commissions.

Mr. Brezhnev and Mr. Gromyko had also pressed strongly for French agreement to participate in the M.B.F.R. negotiations. France had merely reaffirmed her position which was unchanged and was based on opposition to the bloc-to-bloc system, on the desire to avoid creating or aggravating a military imbalance in central Europe and on recognition of the dangers of any attempt to neutralise that area. The Russians had put forward their views, from which it was clear that the negotiations would be long and complicated and that they greatly hoped for French participation at some stage. M. Pompidou had merely said that since the Russians themselves expected the negotiations to be long and since there would be other Franco-Soviet meetings in the future, opportunities would arise to discuss the matter again.

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The problem of relations between the U.S.S.R. and the European Economic Community was raised by Mr. Brezhnev, who was concerned as to how bilateral trade negotiations could take place once trade with eastern countries had become a Community responsibility. He had also referred to the possibility of contacts, or even co-operation, between the E.E.C. and COMECON on these two points; there was no time for discussion.

Finally, other subjects such as Vietnam and the Middle East were touched upon but only in general terms. The final communiqué reflected the direction taken by the discussion.

This visit had provided the French Government with an opportunity to give their hosts a better understanding of the reasons underlying their attitude, in particular, on European affairs. Recent developments in some Soviet attitudes in Helsinki gave the impression that this had been understood.

The other important event in relations between France and the East in the last few months had been M. Schumann's visit to Bucharest on 29th and 30th January. The Minister had been received by Mr. Ceaucescu and Mr. Maurer. There had also been two talks with his Romanian opposite number, Mr. Macovescu. The subjects discussed had again been the C.S.C.E., M.B.F.R. and relations with the Common Market. Since the Romanians had given their views very fully on the Conference since the opening of discussions in Helsinki, M. Bettencourt merely added that they had stressed their desire for the equality of participants to be fully respected and had recalled the importance they attached to reaffirmation of the principle of refraining from the use of force. They, like the Russians, had urged that the C.S.C.E. should set up a permanent body to prepare subsequent sessions of the Conference; in their view, therefore, this should be an administrative body and not a European security council; all countries should be represented on it.

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With regard to M.B.F.R., Mr. Macovescu, without dwelling on his Government's reasons for taking part, had outlined the programme the Romanians would like to see covered by the Vienna conversations: reduction of foreign forces, reduction of armaments, reduction of national forces. In their view, these three successive headings of M.B.F.R. could be discussed in different geographical committees, for Northern Europe, Central Europe and the Balkans. The Romanians had made it quite clear that it was, in their view, inconceivable that any reduction of Romanian national forces could be discussed without their being present.

With regard to the Common Market, this raised two problems for the Romanians. One, which was vital in their eyes, was the granting by the Community of general preferences to their country, as allowed to the under-developed countries. M. Schumann had been able to satisfy them on this point. He had announced to Mr. Macovescu that, setting aside their economic objections, namely, that the inclusion in this system of preferences of Romania, which was an expanding industrial country, was obviously not in the interests of the countries of the Third World, the French Government had decided, for political reasons, not to oppose a favourable decision by the Community once the question of relations between the Common Market and Israel and Spain was settled. The second problem which, for the time being, was more theoretical, concerned relations between the socialist states and the Community. Mr. Macovescu had confirmed what was already known, namely, that Romania did not object to contacts between the organisations themselves, i.e. between the Community and COMECON, but intended to retain her freedom either to go through COMECON to some extent, or to approach the Community direct, according to what was in her own interests which, throughout their conversations with M. Schumann, the Romanians had shown themselves more than ever concerned to protect.

Mr. WESTERTERP (translation from French) wished to report briefly on a visit to the Netherlands in early January by the Romanian Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Gliga. Conversations had been held in The Hague, at the latter's request, on matters connected with the C.S.C.E. The Romanians had argued that there should be some link between this conference and talks on measures towards military détente,

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were prepared to declare the agreement invalid, and in doing so to emphasise once again that what had happened at that time was an act of injustice; but they could not go further than this. They were hoping, however, that progress would soon be made, because a settlement with the C.S.S.R. was linked with the question of instituting diplomatic relations with Hungary and Bulgaria, and this was a topic which they wanted to see settled very soon to the satisfaction of both sides.

Mr. ROYLE had been most interested to hear the comments made by Mr. Apel on the developments which had taken place in relations between the Federal German Government and Poland and the Soviet Union, and he thought it had been particularly valuable to hear Mr. Apel's assessment of how their relations would now develop with Czechoslovakia. M. Bettencourt's remarks on the talks between M. Pompidou and Mr. Brezhnev and those of M. Schumann in Bucharest were also revealing in that they showed that a great deal of time had been spent on the subject of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe and M.B.F.R.'s.

It was quite clear that the most significant development in East-West relations in the last six months had been the start of preparations for the holding of a Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe and the negotiations about M.B.F.R.'s in central Europe. In the British view, the talks in Helsinki were going well for the West. The nine member states of the European Communities had played the major part in an effective defence of the proposals tabled by the West, and it was clear that the detailed preparations over the last few years had produced a welcome solidarity amongst the western participants. This was an encouraging development in terms of European unity, as it had been successful in forcing the Russians to moderate their approach to the Conference and to accept the need for more detailed preparations than they had earlier envisaged. It was important that this solidarity should be maintained. It was clearly in the western interest, and indeed had been welcomed by some of the neutral and non-aligned countries as also in theirs, that the preparations for the Conference were sufficiently thorough to enable the West to raise all those many issues to which they attached importance.

/In Mr. Royle's opinion ...

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In Mr. Royle's opinion, one of the salient features of the talks was the way the Soviet Union had made all the running on the Warsaw Pact side. It was highly significant that they had tabled in their own name the Warsaw Pact proposals on all the four subject areas under discussion. They were giving every sign of wanting the talks to reach a speedy conclusion and were therefore exercising tight control over the pace of movement towards compromise. It was noticeable, moreover, that of the eastern European countries, it was the G.D.R. and Poland that were the most effective delegations. In the first session, it had been the Romanians and, to a much lesser extent, the Poles who appeared to deviate from the Soviet line, and Mr. Royle had been interested in Mr. Westerterp's comments on his talks with the Romanians. No doubt, more would be discovered of the Romanian attitude and the line they were going to take, in the course of M. Ceaucescu's forthcoming visit to the Netherlands. In the second session of talks, it had been the G.D.R. which had shown signs of most confidence and flexibility. The Poles, particularly in their speech on human and cultural relations, had shown themselves to be hard-liners, and the Romanians had appeared conspicuously silent. In the view of the United Kingdom Government, the lesson to be drawn from Helsinki was the importance of western solidarity; the same should hold for the M.B.F.R. negotiations in Vienna.

Talks there had got off to a sticky start, but there could be no doubt that if all those involved in the West stood firm, as indeed they must, they would be able to entice the Russians into detailed discussions about force levels in central Europe, which was their purpose. As had emerged from the talks between M. Pompidou and Mr. Brezhnev in the Soviet Union, the Vienna talks would inevitably be long, complicated and very difficult; but the first and foremost aim must be to ensure that the West was no less secure at the end of the discussions than they were at the beginning.

With regard to bilateral relations between Britain and the Soviet Union, they were still somewhat uneven, but the trend was upwards. It looked as if 1973 would be a more fruitful year: the United Kingdom Government were about to sign a new cultural agreement

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with the Russians, the Joint Commission on Trade and Technology would reconvene in Moscow in April, and a number of other events and exchanges were scheduled to take place later throughout the year. Nevertheless, Soviet policy and propaganda towards Britain remained unfriendly. The British, for their part, had been emphasising that they did not regard the defence of their legitimate national interests as incompatible with a more fruitful and courteous relationship than at present, and while remaining realistic about the scope for closer understanding with Moscow, would continue to work for an improvement in their relationship.

The United Kingdom had also continued to maintain close contacts with the countries of eastern Europe. In recent months, a number of Polish and Hungarian visitors had been welcomed to Britain; and an industrial co-operation agreement had been concluded with Czechoslovakia in September last. Contacts with these countries were not, of course, only in the governmental sphere; students from eastern Europe were encouraged to study in the United Kingdom, and visits by specialists and tourists, especially younger people, were welcome. The programme of ministerial visits was designed to provide the maximum practical benefit to both sides. In particular, the British Government had in recent weeks welcomed from Poland no fewer than four full Ministers and twice as many Vice-Ministers. They regarded it as particularly important to reassure the countries of eastern Europe that Britain's interest in them had in no sense waned because they were now members of the European Economic Community. On the contrary, it was hoped that this year would give tangible proof that the wider economic and human co-operation with the countries of eastern Europe, to which last October's Summit Conference referred, had a real meaning for people in Britain.

Relations with the southern part of eastern Europe had continued to develop satisfactorily. The highlight had been the very successful visit paid by Her Majesty the Queen to Yugoslavia last October, and there had been a steady flow of visitors to and from Yugoslavia, Romania and Bulgaria, both at ministerial and official level. These visits had supplemented the friendly and businesslike contacts which the British Government sought to promote over the widest field.

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