

Extract from minutes of the 356th meeting of the WEU Council (20 November 1968)

Caption: On 20 November 1968, the Council of Western European Union (WEU) meets in London to discuss the level of forces of WEU Member States placed under the command of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Given the special situation of France within NATO, the Netherlands delegation expresses doubts as to whether the current procedure for the unanimous approval of force levels can continue to be applied.

Source: Council of the Western European Union. Extract from minutes of the 356th meeting of WEU Council held on 20th November 1968. CR (68) 21. pp. 13-14. Archives nationales de Luxembourg (ANLux). <http://www.anlux.lu>. Western European Union Archives. Secretariat-General/Council's Archives. 1954-1987. Organs of the Western European Union. Year: 1980, 01/10/1960-31/05/1960. File 243.20. Volume 3/5.

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EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF 358th MEETING
OF W.E.U. COUNCIL HELD ON 20th November 1968

V. LEVEL OF FORCES OF W.E.U. MEMBER STATES PLACED
UNDER NATO COMMAND

(CR (67) 21, III; CR (68) 3, III; CR (68) 4, II;
C (68) 2 and 13; CR (68) 5, V; C (68) 142;
CR (68) 20, III)

The CHAIRMAN recalled that the Council had a first discussion, at its last meeting, on the question of examining the level of forces of member states under NATO command for 1968, in the light of the resolution of 15th September 1956.

The NETHERLANDS Ambassador could not agree to the application again this year of the ad hoc procedure adopted last year. He would however be asking his Government if they had any new proposals and delegations had agreed to reconsider the whole question with a view to continuing their discussion at the present meeting.

Mr. van ROIJEN then made the following statement:

"As I explained during the last meeting of this Council, my Government is of the opinion that it might be useful to take a closer look at the exercise undertaken by virtue of the resolution of 15th September 1956, in view of the changed circumstances.

It should be recalled that this procedure was established at the request of the French Government. Initially, the Government of the Netherlands was rather reluctant to support the relevant French proposal for the following reasons:

Article III of Protocol II states specifically that any increase of the level of forces can equally well be unanimously approved in the North Atlantic Council as in the Council of Western European Union. Furthermore, this procedure is only prescribed in case of any real increase of forces above the prescribed limits. Any procedure of an automatic nature which would annually bring together the representatives of NATO countries and subsequently the Council of W.E.U. did therefore not appear - in the view of the Netherlands Government - as a necessary one and, in any case, did not follow directly from the terms of the Revised Brussels Treaty.

Notwithstanding these objections, the Netherlands Government and the governments of the other member countries eventually acquiesced in the French proposal.

It should, however, be noted that this special procedure only made sense as long as an exchange could take place between all member countries, and on an equal basis, with regard to their military plans. However, for obvious reasons, since 1966 this is no longer the case as far as France is concerned. It is for this reason that the ad hoc procedure was followed in 1967, taking into account that the French Government in its answer to the NATO questionnaire concerning "forces for the common defence under national command" continued to give certain information with regard to the forces withdrawn from NATO command. However, the most recent answer to this questionnaire (I refer to DRC/N (68) 2 of 7th May 1968) contains only exceedingly scant information on this specific point. For example: the hitherto supplied information with regard to the structure of the French forces, such as the number of divisions etc., is lacking.

Finally, attention should be drawn to the fact that the growing discrepancy between the actual NATO plans and the so-called Lisbon force goals of 1952, which form the basis for the maximum levels adopted under the Revised Brussels Treaty, tends to reduce the whole question of these W.E.U. maxima to an academic problem.

The procedure for the unanimous approval of an increase of the level of forces above the specified limits has in the past only been put into practice with regard to certain units of the German Navy and this as a consequence of the special character of the maximum levels established in this respect (Article II of Protocol II). Should any increase occur in future, the country concerned is, under Article III of Protocol II, obliged to ask the unanimous approval of the other member states for such an increase.

Summing up, I should like to make it quite clear that I have not been directed, in any case at this stage, to make any specific proposal on behalf of my Government, but I am only to ask the other members of the Council to report back to their governments with the request seriously to reconsider whether they deem it useful and necessary to continue the exercise under consideration."

M. de COURCEL said that he was sorry that the Netherlands Government, which had originally proposed it, now wanted to abandon the ad hoc procedure agreed only the previous
: year. The French Government desired that its special
: position in NATO should so far as possible, be scrupulously
: adapted to the provisions of the W.E.U. Treaty, and had
therefore accepted the ad hoc procedure proposed. This could probably have been perfected, but, in the light of Mr. van Roijen's statement, which certainly merited reflection, the French Ambassador would have to refer back to his Government before commenting further.

Delegations agreed to submit the Netherlands statement to their governments for study, and to continue their discussions on this question at a forthcoming meeting of the Council.

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