Extract from minutes of the 498th meeting of the WEU Council concerning written question 160 from the WEU Assembly (17 September 1975)

Caption: At the 498th meeting of the Council of Western European Union (WEU), held on 17 September 1975, the delegations discuss the draft replies to question 160 put to the WEU Council by Assembly member Mr Krieg. The member had asked if the nuclear forces of two WEU member countries (France and the United Kingdom) would be capable of playing a role in a western defence system based on selective nuclear retaliation. The Council notes that the delegations are finding it hard to reach agreement on a reply. Unlike the Dutch, the French and the British are keen to emphasise the fact that the Ottawa Declaration explicitly recognises the deterrent role of France and the United Kingdom in the overall strengthening of the deterrence of the Atlantic Alliance.

Source: Council of the Western European Union. Extract from minutes of 498th meeting of WEU Council held on 17 September 1975. IV. Question concerning the Assembly. Draft replies to written questions 159 and 160. 17.09.1975. CR (75) 11. pp. 7-12. 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: 1975, 01/05/1975-30/04/1976. File 202.413.22. Volume 1/1.

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EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF 498th MEETING
OF W.E.U. COUNCIL HELD ON 17th September 1975

FILE NO.
CR (75) 11

IV. QUESTION CONCERNING THE ASSEMBLY

Draft replies to written questions 156 and 160

1. Written question 160
(CR (75) 10, III, 1 b); C (75) 100)

The CHAIRMAN reminded the Council that, at their previous meeting on 21st July, they had had before them the draft reply prepared by the working group, and circulated as C (75) 100; as indicated in a footnote, the Netherlands delegation proposed deletion of the second paragraph of this draft.

The Netherlands representative had maintained this request. In the course of the discussion which followed (see pp. 10 to 12 of CR (75) 10), the Belgian Ambassador had suggested merely quoting the Ottawa Declaration; to this end, he had suggested that the words "Il convient par ailleurs de rappeler que la déclaration ..." in the French text be replaced by "D'autre part, la déclaration ..." and that the word "explicitly" which appeared later, should be deleted. As this was not acceptable to the Netherlands delegation, it had been agreed to wait until they had obtained their Government's reaction to the comments made on that occasion and to resume discussion at the current meeting.

Recalling that the Netherlands representative had set out fully at the last meeting the reasons why his Government wished that the reply to this question should be confined to the first paragraph of the draft, Baron GEVERS thought it would nevertheless be useful if he set out once again what these objections were.

When the Ottawa Declaration, which was mentioned in the second paragraph, had been drafted the Netherlands Government had not objected to the specific reference to nuclear forces in Europe, because they had not wished to withhold their approval from a political declaration accepted by all other parties. At the same time, however, they had not thought it correct to draw from that political declaration any conclusion on a strategic point, such as selective retaliation.

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It was for political reasons, therefore, that the Dutch delegation had wished the reply to be limited to the first paragraph of the draft and had maintained their objection to paragraph 2.

In view of the discussions at the last Council meeting - and his Government were grateful for the suggestions made by other delegations to meet their objections - the whole matter had been studied very carefully at the highest level in his Ministry. This study had not however led to any change of mind, so the same political objections to any reference to paragraph 6 of the Ottawa Declaration in the context of answering this written question remained, as well as the conviction that for the purpose of answering this question, the first paragraph of the draft answer would be quite sufficient.

Nevertheless, if the Council could not agree to suppress purely and simply paragraph 2, the Netherlands Minister would be prepared to consider a compromise solution whereby reference was made to the Declaration of Ottawa, but in such a way that it left open the possibility for every member state to interpret in their own manner the meaning of that Declaration and in particular its paragraph 6.

The Ambassador therefore proposed that the second paragraph might read: "In this context, the Council may refer to the Declaration on Atlantic Relations, approved on 19th June, 1974 at Ottawa by the North Atlantic Council, and the views expressed by the various Governments in that respect."

M. BORSA said the Italian delegation would like the role of United States forces in the nuclear defence of Europe to be mentioned. They proposed, therefore, that a third paragraph be added to the draft under consideration, as follows:

"This deterrent role therefore strengthens all the forces intended for the protection of the security of Europe, the nuclear defence of which, in present circumstances, depends not only on the role of the United States nuclear forces, but also on this European contribution.".

/M. de BEAUMARCHAIS ...

M. de BEAUMARCHAIS observed that the second part of the Netherlands proposal - "and the views expressed by the various governments in that respect", was difficult to understand; moreover, this wording gave the impression that the text of the Ottawa Declaration on this point had been interpreted in different ways by the various governments. He therefore asked his Netherlands colleague whether it might not be deleted. Having said this, the Ambassador added that he was not at all sure that his Government would accept a mere reference to the Ottawa Declaration.

M. ROTHSCHILD enquired whether the Netherlands delegation had entered reservations at Ottawa, or stated that they placed a different interpretation on paragraph 6 of the Declaration.

Baron GEVERS said that he understood that after the Ottawa meeting, the Netherlands Government's answers to questions asked in Parliament about paragraph 6 of the Declaration had been somewhat qualified.

The Ambassador was prepared to put M. de Beaumarchais' suggestion to his authorities.

M. de BEAUMARCHAIS repeated that he was not certain that his Government would accept the proposed formula, but it seemed to him that deletion of the second part of the Netherlands proposal might facilitate matters; he added that, in his view, the first part of this sentence should be drafted in such a way as to bring out the connection between the subject of question 160 and the Council's reply.

The CHAIRMAN reminded delegates that another question raised by the French Ambassador and left unresolved at the previous meeting concerned retention or deletion of the word "strategic" in the first line of the draft reply.

M. de BEAUMARCHAIS said his concern had been that the Council should not appear to be limiting the scope of the question, which was not about strategic nuclear forces only.

/M. ROTHSCHILD supported ...

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M. ROTHSCHILD supported his French colleague's view.

With the agreement of the other delegations, it was decided to replace "Any strategic nuclear force" by "Any nuclear force".

Mr. von HASE suggested that, in view of the difficult position in which the Council found themselves, the reply should be limited to the first two sentences of the draft under consideration; this formula seemed to him both adequate and safe. If such a solution were not adopted, he would favour referring the question back to the working group.

Baron GEVERS felt that the German Ambassador's proposal would fully satisfy his Government's request and he supported it.

As to the Italian proposal, his personal view was that this would complicate matters for his Government.

M. ROTHSCHILD, while quite understanding the views of the Italian delegation, feared that their proposal might make it more difficult to find a solution; moreover, he felt that, to a large extent, it only repeated what was already stated in paragraph 6 of the Ottawa Declaration. He therefore wondered whether the Italian delegation might not be able to withdraw it.

The Ambassador added that he would not favour the idea of limiting the reply to the first paragraph of the draft under consideration. To assist his Netherlands colleague, he was prepared to support the formula suggested by M. de Beaumarchais. The second part of the Netherlands proposal would, in his view, be dangerous; if governments gave undertakings in one international forum, without entering reservations, formal reference could hardly be made in another multilateral forum to the interpretations of these undertakings given by a government before its parliament; in the event, inclusion in the reply of the second part of the Netherlands proposal would imply that the Council recognised views which the Netherlands Government had defended before its own parliament but which had never been acknowledged multilaterally.

/Finally, the ...

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Finally, the Ambassador stressed that the question called for the statement of a political view by the Council.

M. BORGA said the Italian delegation had made their proposal because they wished to include an explicit reference to the role of the United States nuclear forces in the defence of Europe.

Mr. MORGAN thought his Government could accept the short reply suggested by the German Ambassador, if this solution were acceptable to all other delegations. He also thought that his Government could approve the second paragraph as proposed by the Netherlands delegation, with the amendment suggested by the French Ambassador. Clearly however, delegations would have to refer to their governments and he did not therefore wish to commit himself further at the moment. The Italian amendment would seem to complicate the drafting of the reply and Mr. Morgan would have to consult his experts before accepting it.

Answering a question from the CHAIRMAN, Mr. von HASE said he was in the fortunate position of being able to accept virtually all the proposals which had been made, including the original draft. He understood the difficulties involved, however, and had thought therefore that his proposal for a short reply only might be useful to other delegations.

Referring to his earlier proposal, M. de BEAUMARCHAIS repeated that this was a personal suggestion. The paragraph suggested by the Netherlands delegation would then read: "In this context, the Council may refer to the passage on this subject in the Declaration on Atlantic Relations, approved on 19th June, 1974, at Ottawa by the North Atlantic Council". Some link was needed with the first paragraph and not simply a reference to the Ottawa Declaration as a whole.

/M. ALEX believed ...

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M. ALEX believed that his Government would like to retain at least a reference to the Ottawa Declaration. He could therefore probably support the Franco-Belgian proposal.

Baron GEVERS said he envied his German colleague who could accept any of the proposed wordings. Unfortunately, he was not in the same position. He thanked the German, Belgian and French Ambassadors for their efforts to meet the Netherlands objections but he could not, for the time being, accept any change to the draft text he had submitted. He would, of course, report the whole discussion to The Hague.

The CHAIRMAN stated that the Secretariat would prepare a new document as quickly as possible, incorporating all the amendments proposed during the discussion.

Mr. MORGAN pointed out that the third paragraph proposed by the Italian delegation was linked to the original draft and would have to be amended according to the final decision regarding the first two paragraphs.

It was agreed that in order to prepare and assist discussion of this question by the Council at their next meeting, the working group would consider the new document based on the present discussion, at its next sitting.

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