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10th February, 1948.

CABINET

WESTERN UNIONMemorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs

My colleagues will want to know what has been done to realise the policy laid down in my speech of 21st January and what steps I propose should be taken in the immediate future.

The Treaties with the Benelux Powers

My colleagues will recollect that I proposed that as a first step a hard core of the Western Union should be formed by creating a treaty relationship between France and Britain on the one hand and the Benelux Powers on the other; and that I agreed with the French Government that our two Governments should make a joint offer to the Benelux Powers of a treaty on the Dunkirk model. Since then the Benelux Powers have met in Luxemburg, and the Minister of State has seen their representatives in Brussels. I append (Annex I) the account by the Minister of State of his conversations from which it is clear that the Benelux Powers are reluctant to accept a treaty on the Dunkirk model and are thinking rather of a regional pact, possibly based on Article 52 of the Charter of the United Nations.

I have at the same time been in close touch with the French Government. A summary of these negotiations (Annex II) shows that they are opposed to the conception of a regional pact under Article 52 of the Charter and recommend that our two Governments should forthwith communicate to the Benelux Governments as a basis of discussion the British draft of a treaty on the Dunkirk model.

Recommendations

In order to reconcile these divergent views and make quick progress towards our goal, I recommend that we should:

(1) Communicate our draft treaty on the Dunkirk model, as M. Bidault suggests, to the Benelux Powers. But we should make it clear that we want to ascertain their views and wishes and only regard our draft as a basis of discussion. At the same time we should explain the reasons which had prompted us to start off with Treaties on the Dunkirk model.

(2) Propose as a next step that the problem should be considered by a preliminary Five-Power meeting of Foreign Ministers in a Benelux capital, possibly Brussels. This preliminary meeting, which should take place early in March, should issue a broad directive as to the lines on which a treaty should be drafted.

(3) Meanwhile we should make a careful study of the American Rio Agreement, pacts under either Article 51 or 52 of the Charter, the Soviet treaties with their satellites and any other suitable instrument, so that we might be able to put forward at the preliminary meeting such modifications of our Dunkirk draft as would render it acceptable.

General Considerations

In order to meet M. Bidault's views as far as possible there would, in my opinion, be no objection to falling in with his proposal that we should communicate the British draft treaty to the Benelux Powers, always provided that we make it clear at the same time that we are treating them on a footing of equality and that there is no question of two big powers attempting to impose on them a form of treaty which they do not like. At the same time we could explain that we originally favoured the Dunkirk model on the ground that we were reluctant to take any step inconsistent with my statements that our arrangements with Western Europe were not aimed against Russia. Here we have to bear in mind the over-riding consideration that the intention behind the project for a Western Union is not to divide Europe irretrievably, but rather to create a situation which will permit of an eventual accommodation with Eastern Europe.

The ground on which I propose a preliminary meeting is that if we are to make the progress which is expected of us, we cannot afford the delays and possible misunderstandings which might be caused by the attempt to handle this complicated question through British and French diplomatic channels in three different capitals. I shall therefore work for a preliminary meeting of the Foreign Ministers early in March.

As regards the form of the treaty, I think it is important that there should be some reference to Germany, if we are to avoid misunderstanding on the part of Russia. We should, however, try to work in any elements of possible pacts under Article 51 and 52 of the Charter, the Rio Agreement, the Russian treaties or other precedents which may be useful. I may remark in parenthesis that the Benelux idea of a regional pact based purely on Article 52 of the Charter is unlikely to be satisfactory in practice. There would of course be nothing in the Charter to prevent such a pact, but enforcement action under it would be governed by Article 53 of the Charter and, except in case of measures to be taken against ex-enemy States, could only be taken with the authorisation of the Security Council, which of course could be vetoed by Russia.

Since it is our intention that the association which will be formed by this treaty should evolve and extend, it occurs to me that it would be an advantage to create a consultative committee of representatives of the participating

powers to study and collaborate in the developments of the Western Union in all its forms. Provision for the creation of such a committee might possibly be inserted in the Treaty. Thus everything possible would be done to ensure that the association of the participating powers would be a living and growing organism.

E.B.

Foreign Office, S.W.1.
10th February, 1948.

ANNEX IMemorandum by the Minister of State

The following are the chief points from conversations which I held with the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxemburg in Brussels on 5th February, 1948. I saw M. Spaak, Baron van Boetzelaer, and M. Bech separately.

2. M. Spaak said that the situation was dominated by the Secretary of State's speech of 22nd January which had excited the peoples of Western Europe and given them new confidence. He insisted that it was vital that Britain should maintain the lead and argued that the following steps should be taken urgently before impetus was lost.

(a) Treaties of mutual assistance should be concluded as soon as possible. He said that none of the Benelux countries favoured an agreement similar to the Dunkirk treaty since it was directed purely against Germany. They would prefer some regional association under Article 51 or 52 of the United Nations Charter. M. Spaak stressed that such a treaty should also refer to the Rio Agreement since this would appeal to public opinion in America.

(b) M. Spaak was anxious that military conversations should accompany the discussions of the treaty. He was seeking the closest staff and technical co-operation. This would mean more than formal frontier guarantees. He did not expect formal American participation at this stage although he plainly hoped for American approval. He felt that the best way of ultimately obtaining American help was for Western Europe to go ahead and show itself capable of action, just as the sixteen nations had done after the Harvard speech.

(c) M. Spaak was equally anxious for economic conversations. Here again he was modest and realistic and said he did not expect a Customs Union next week. He stressed the urgency of starting these conversations before the divergencies between the economic policies of the Western European Powers (typified, amongst other things, by the French action over the franc) developed further. He argued that the existence of Benelux provided a means by which the sometimes narrow policies of its individual members could be transformed into a broad policy in the interest of all. While not committing myself to definite economic conversations, I suggested that, were they to take place, they should include conversations on joint African development as a corollary to Western European economic collaboration. M. Spaak said that this had a military aspect too.

3. Both in his remarks on treaty negotiations and on economic matters M. Spaak made it evident that the prestige of France had deteriorated in the Low Countries and that, whereas British leadership would be welcome, both Belgium and Holland would find it politically embarrassing if the role of France were to be exaggerated.

4. M. Spaak expressed pleasure at the assurance I was able to give him that we intended to seek means to associate the Benelux powers with the problem of Western German economic developments.
5. The conversation was extremely cordial throughout. It was on all subjects strictly exploratory and emphasised the desirability of co-ordinating policy as a first step to collaboration.
6. The Dutch Foreign Minister made the same points as M. Spaak had done. He stated, firstly, that it would be necessary to keep things moving quickly if we were to retain the goodwill created by the Secretary of State's speech, secondly that his country would prefer to follow British rather than French leadership, and thirdly that a treaty on the Dunkirk model would be unsuitable. His constructive proposals were also similar to M. Spaak's, namely that any treaty should be based on Article 52 of the United Nations Charter, that in addition it should have some analogy to the Rio Treaty and that it should be supplemented by a satisfactory military guarantee. He gave the impression that while his government would wish to avoid publicity they would be prepared to engage in military talks privately.
7. The Dutch Foreign Minister stated that his government did not expect any political embarrassment from negotiations for a Western Union and would not wish the matter to be delayed till after their elections. He emphasised the importance to his country of being associated in the formulation of economic policy for Germany. I had the impression that the Dutch reaction to the Secretary of State's speech was more cautious than that of the other two Benelux countries.
8. M. Bech, Foreign Minister of Luxemburg, reiterated all the points made by M. Spaak and Baron van Boetzelaer. He added that he had been surprised by the great response of the common people in his country to the Secretary of State's speech. He stressed that the Socialist Party in Luxemburg in particular were giving him their full support for this policy.
9. He made two stipulations, however. Firstly he asked that Luxemburg should not be asked to shoulder any additional military burdens. Secondly he urged that Luxemburg should not be expected to negotiate treaties as an individual country but only as a member of the Benelux group, though she would of course have to sign individually.

H. McN.

Foreign Office, S.W.1.

10th February, 1948.

ANNEX IISummary of discussions with the French Government

The views of the Secretary of State on the organisation of Western Europe were communicated to Monsieur Bidault on 15th January, and have since been discussed with him and with Monsieur Chauvel on various occasions.

The two governments informed the Benelux Governments on 20th January that they would jointly offer a treaty to these powers. It had been agreed with M. Bidault that the treaty should be on the model of the Anglo-French treaty of Dunkirk. At M. Bidault's request a draft of such a treaty was prepared in the Foreign Office and shown to the French on 27th January. Subsequent conversations with the French show that they are in favour of the conclusion of separate treaties with the Benelux countries. They do not feel that it is possible to adopt the suggestion of the Benelux countries that agreements should be concluded with their group as a whole, because "Benelux" is not a political entity; to meet this point Monsieur Bidault has suggested that it might be possible to have one text to which five signatures would be appended.

The French consider that the Treaty of Dunkirk provides a suitable model, and are not in favour of the Benelux proposal that a regional pact should be drawn up under Article 52 of the United Nations Charter. They are prepared, however, to discuss the matter and M. Bidault has suggested that Article 2 of the Dunkirk Treaty (which provides for assistance in the event of hostilities with Germany) might be expanded to cover consultation.

As regards military agreements, Monsieur Chauvel (Director General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) has pointed out that it would be a mistake to pour cold water on the proposals of the Benelux governments and suggests that we should reply that there should of course be military arrangements eventually but that the political framework must be constructed first. Monsieur Chauvel gave us his own idea that Anglo-French military conversations should be completed first, that we should then find out what the United States Government would be prepared to do to help, and after that enter into discussions with the Benelux governments.

As regards economic agreements Monsieur Bidault has said that he hopes His Majesty's Government will take an active part both in encouraging customs unions between France and Italy and France and Benelux and in devising means to participate themselves.

The French accept the draft treaty prepared as a model in the Foreign Office and urge that it should be presented to the Benelux Governments without delay in order to forestall any concrete counter proposal which the Benelux governments might put forward.

Foreign Office, S.W.1.
10th February, 1948.

