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CABINET

THE BRUSSELS TREATY

MEMORANDUM BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

I circulate herewith, for the information of my colleagues, records of a conversation I had in Brussels on 17th March with the Foreign Ministers of France, Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg on a number of subjects arising from the Treaty. There is one point to which I should like to draw particular attention.

2. Article VII of the Treaty provides for a permanent Consultative Council. This Council is a novel conception to which I attach considerable importance. It is proposed that the Council shall consist of the Foreign Ministers of the five Powers, or of other Ministers, if the subject and occasion so require. The Ministers should meet from time to time, but meanwhile the permanent work of the Council should be carried on by Deputies. The first meeting of the Deputies is to take place in Brussels on 24th March. Their first task will be to make recommendations in regard to the seat of the Council, its agenda and the formation of a secretariat. They will also have to consider the establishment of specialised sub-committees as and when they are required. There are a number of subjects which in my view should come before the Consultative Council as soon as sub-committees have reported. These include social security, defence, co-operation between intelligence services and economics. In regard to the latter care will have to be taken not to cut across the work of the Continuing Organisation for the European Recovery Programme, but I do not anticipate difficulty here.

3. I was impressed in Brussels by the fact that the other Foreign Ministers shared my desire to take energetic steps to make this Treaty a practical instrument of international co-operation in every field. I hope that the use of the Consultative Council on the lines outlined above will enable us to realise this aim.

E. B.

*Foreign Office, S.W. 1,
24th March, 1948.*

Record of a private conversation between the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg at the Belgian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, on 17th March, after the signature of the Brussels Treaty

Present :

United Kingdom	...	MR. BEVIN.
France	M. GEORGES BIDAULT.
Belgium...	M. PAUL-HENRI SPAAK.
Netherlands	BARON VAN BOETZELAAR.
Luxembourg	M. BECH.

(The British Ambassador (Sir G. Rendel) and the French and Netherlands Ambassadors were also present. Mr. F. K. Roberts acted as interpreter.)

M. Spaak said that they had had very good results from the negotiations of the past few weeks and asked the Secretary of State, who had suggested this meeting, to set out his ideas.

The Secretary of State explained that he thought it would not make a very good impression nor be consistent with the urgency of the situation if the Foreign Ministers merely signed the Treaty and then parted company immediately afterwards. He thought it important that they should take advantage of their presence together in Brussels to consider how to proceed with the constructive tasks foreseen in the Treaty.

The first problem was to decide on the constitution of the Consultative Council. Should they advise their Governments that this should consist of the Foreign Ministers themselves with Deputies and officials under them for the permanent and detailed work? There was an urgent necessity to begin discussions on several questions soon. For example, they must consider how best to approach the question of defence. He thought that the Foreign Ministers should consider it in its broadest aspects, with a view to giving a general directive to their military experts, who should think in terms not of the last war but of any future war. They should arrange a time for the full consideration of such a question.

The second question was that of Communist infiltration. This had been considered by the British Cabinet just before Mr. Bevin left London and his colleagues attached the greatest importance to it. The Prime Minister's statement in the House of Commons on 15th March showed the dangers in the United Kingdom, where infiltration had taken place in some scientific and research institutions and even in the administration itself. He thought that their chief intelligence experts should concert together with a view to overhauling all security questions, including a study of the methods to prevent sudden disturbances in factories and workshops by Communist cells. He was convinced that they could learn a great deal from each other on how to proceed.

The third question was finance, which had also been considered by some of his colleagues just before he left London. He did not wish to interfere in any way with the meeting of the sixteen countries under the Committee of European Economic Co-operation and the Continuing Organisation, but they could perhaps arrange for expert study between the five Brussels Treaty countries of the whole balance of payments problem. He had thought that the five Finance Ministers might meet to see whether arrangements could not be made as between the five countries to avoid any dollar or gold payments among themselves. This would help to establish equilibrium.

The fourth question concerned social security, which was the subject of one of the clauses in the Treaty and to which Mr. Bevin attached great importance. He thought we should aim as time went on at harmonising and developing our respective social services, since real social and economic security was the best antidote to communism.

The above were the main points which Mr. Bevin thought the Foreign Ministers should consider before they left Brussels. He did not suggest they could be fully discussed to-day, but they might have a preparatory talk with a view to meeting later to consider all these problems within the framework of the constructive edifice of the Brussels Treaty.

M. Bidault agreed that all these were important questions. The permanent Consultative Council was an essential instrument of the Treaty. His own general idea was that it would have a very good effect if the Foreign Ministers themselves met from time to time in addition to the work of the permanent body, which should in his view arrange for at least monthly meetings of Deputies. The Ministers would themselves meet whenever necessary, and in any case at least once a year. *M. Bidault* attached special importance in present circumstances to defence and security questions. He thought that now they had signed this Treaty of mutual assistance they must at once consider the necessary measures to strengthen their security. He had no objection to these general defence questions being discussed first on a political basis between the Foreign Ministers with a view to giving instructions to their respective General Staffs. He hoped thus that our defences could be organised if we were given time to do this, which he hoped we should, but there was of course no assurance of this.

Baron van Boetzelaar then suggested that the first thing to do was to establish the Consultative Council which should itself in the first place consider all the problems raised by Mr. Bevin. *M. Spaak* agreed with this and suggested that they should decide to set up the Consultative Committee in one of their capitals with a view to putting the Treaty into effect in all its aspects—military, social, economic, &c. Ministers would then meet when necessary. The immediate decision required from them, therefore, was the form the Council should take and the place in which it should be established.

Mr. Bevin said he had no desire to rush his colleagues into any quick decisions. He thought they should think over these questions and then meet to consider them. He had merely wanted to put the issues before his colleagues at this meeting. They would naturally each of them have to consult their Governments on their return. *M. Bidault* agreed that no decisions could be taken to-day as they had not yet referred these matters to their respective Governments. It occurred to him that possibly different sections of the Consultative Committee—political, economic, social, &c.—might be set up in different places. *M. Spaak* suggested that these questions could be gone into when the Deputies met.

It was then agreed that the Deputies should be appointed to meet in Brussels early next week. It was, however, also felt that some preliminary discussion of the various problems could usefully take place at this meeting.

M. Bidault then turned to the question of co-operation against Communist infiltration. There had already been discussions between *M. Spaak* and the French Minister of the Interior with a view to dealing with undesirable characters, controlling foreigners, and generally studying how effectively to counter Communist tactics. He was sure that there would be no difficulty about such consultations. *M. Spaak* agreed, but said that it remained to decide on the method by which the consultations should be held.

M. Bidault then turned to the financial question. He was entirely in favour of considering all such questions which could contribute to bringing the five countries closer together. He thought, however, that it was most important to prepare the ground before the Finance Ministers met as these were complicated questions and they did not wish to arrange ministerial meetings which might prove a failure. With that one reserve he was entirely in favour of the meeting proposed by Mr. Bevin. After Mr. Bevin had suggested that the matter might be considered first by the Deputies, *M. Spaak* said that he was very much in favour of early meetings between Ministers concerned with financial and also economic questions. Such meetings should not have too definite an objective, but should aim at a frank examination of the ways and means by which we could help one another and see how much we could do in common. He was sure that there would be really useful results from such meetings. For example, they might study the respective resources of the five countries with a view to saving dollars. This, after all, was a crucial problem for them all, however great their friendship was with the United States. The responsible Ministers could begin by examining just this one question. This in itself would be extremely useful as there had been great economic difficulties in recent weeks between some of the countries represented at this meeting. It had emerged that their economic and financial policies might diverge or even become opposed and if they each went ahead on their own lines, they might have great difficulty in getting things right again. He thought that it would be helpful for the Ministers concerned to meet and examine a general approach to these problems. These instructions should be given to the Deputies with a view to removing so far as possible these differences.

Mr. Bevin said this was exactly his own idea. He did not want the Finance Ministers to meet with the idea of signing another agreement. What he was aiming at was a long and continuing process of discussion by which we should gradually strengthen our co-operation and create some means of lessening our present heavy financial commitment to the Western Hemisphere.

M. Bidault agreed that it was quite right to give consideration to these questions. Indeed, at first sight some of the economic and social clauses in the Treaty, for example Articles 1, 2 and 3, might appear odd in the context of a pact of mutual assistance. He thought that a study should at once be given to the problems of putting really solid content into these Articles. He hoped that some really solid structure would be built up round the economic and social clauses.

M. Bidault then turned to Article 9, the accession clause. He thought this was an excellent clause enabling States which were invited to accede to the Treaty to do so under their own conditions which might differ in each case. For example, Italy might in present circumstances accede to the economic clause only. United States might be brought into the mutual defence arrangements. But he thought it absolutely essential to get to work as quickly as possible with a view to obtaining United States support for the Treaty which would certainly provoke counter-action from the Soviet side.

Mr. Bevin agreed. He thought that immediate consideration should be given to these issues of military security. As regards the accession of other Powers, it must be considered who it would be advisable to bring in and what part any new Member should play. He had not arrived at any definite conclusions himself, but he thought the Deputies should study these matters and report.

M. Bidault again said that he thought we should move very fast. The most essential issue in present circumstances was that of defence, *i.e.*, the security of Europe and of Western Europe in particular. None of those present could fail to realise the gravity of the present situation. The reason Masaryk had committed suicide was because he feared that war was imminent. He considered that the United States Government were already considering how to give support to Western Europe and the signature of the Treaty to-day was its essential preliminary condition.

M. Spaak then informed the meeting that the Netherlands Ambassador had just told him that information had come in to the effect that the Truman speech would contain some really definite statement. It was agreed, therefore, that the Ministers should meet again at *M. Spaak's* reception when they had been able to consider *Mr. Truman's* speech. *M. Bidault* then informed the Ministers of certain contacts which had already taken place between *Mr. Marshall* on the one side and himself and *Mr. Bevin* on the other. The situation facing us was that Russia might either go to war straight away and the Western European countries would find great difficulty in meeting such a threat, or Russia might perhaps be so confident of an economic crisis weakening the United States and so further weakening Western Europe that they were ready to wait for the ripe fruit to fall into their lap. However that might be, Western Europe above all needed support in the shape of real strength which could alone be found in the United States.

M. Bech then raised the question of the ratification of the Treaty and a general discussion took place from which the following points emerged:—

- (a) Under the French Constitution it was not necessary for the Treaty to be ratified by Parliament. Neither the Franco-Soviet Treaty nor the Treaty of Dunkirk had been submitted to Parliament, which had not in any way affected their validity. *M. Bidault* preferred not to raise the matter in Parliament because it would provoke a very bad-tempered debate in which the Communists would hurl insults. The final vote would, of course, be the usual 419 in favour and 184 Communists against.
- (b) In the United Kingdom the Prime Minister had already made his statement and the text of the Treaty would be laid before the House. Formal parliamentary ratification was not required, although of course there might be a demand for a debate. There was, however, no reason at all to fear that the Treaty would not be approved. *Mr. Bevin* informed his colleagues that the Keep Left movement, who

had criticised him in the past, had now changed their minds and were urging him to go even further and faster in the direction of Western Union.

- (c) The Belgian position was that the Treaty was already in force. M. Spaak had, of course, laid it before Parliament and there might be a demand for a debate, but there was no need to fear its rejection.
- (d) The Netherlands Foreign Minister said that his Prime Minister was making a statement in the Netherlands Chamber that afternoon. Parliament had of course received the text of the Treaty as a measure of courtesy, but the Treaty was, in effect, in force.
- (e) The Luxembourg Foreign Minister explained that he was in rather a special position because Article 1 of the Luxembourg Constitution provided for permanent neutrality in accordance with the arrangements imposed on Luxembourg by the Powers in the 19th century. He must therefore place the Treaty before Parliament, but he would undertake to get it discussed very soon and he was quite sure that the Luxembourg Parliament would approve the Treaty and the change in the Constitution.

M. Bidault said it would be difficult for him to avoid a debate if there were debates in other Parliaments, but it was equally clear from the discussions that, while there was no question of the Treaty not having entered into force, it might be possible to avoid such debates.

It was agreed that the five Ministers should meet again later in the evening to consider Mr. Truman's statement and it was left to M. Spaak to draft a communiqué. The text as approved by the Foreign Ministers for issuing at 10.30 on 18th March is annexed.

ANNEX

The signature of the Treaty between Belgium, France, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom was followed by a conversation between the Foreign Ministers. It was decided that their deputies should meet in Brussels at the beginning of next week, in order to take the necessary steps for the definite establishment of the permanent consultative council mentioned in Article 7 of the Treaty and for this organisation to function.

