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94

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CABINET

THE FIVE POWER TREATY

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs

My colleagues will require an account of my conversations with the other Foreign Ministers in Paris and of the progress made to implement the Five Power Treaty.

2. The main purpose of the Paris meeting was to secure agreement on the organisation of the Consultative Council and in particular on the choice of a capital as its permanent seat. On practical grounds I favoured London, but I had been unable hitherto to secure general agreement on this point. The French Government had put forward the somewhat unpractical proposal that the Foreign Ministers should meet at the various capitals in turn and that sub-committees should be similarly dispersed. The Benelux Governments were prepared in principle to accept London and wished the whole organisation to be centred there, but they were disposed to defer a decision until agreement had been reached on the distribution of posts in the Committee of European Economic Co-operation. On arrival in Paris I found M. Bidault principally concerned lest a complicated and expensive machinery should be prematurely established; whilst the Benelux Governments, who seemed anxious to take the opportunities afforded by the Five Power Treaty to play a more ambitious role in world affairs, were clearly thinking of an organisation on more grandiose lines than present circumstances would appear to justify.

3. I emphasised that the essential thing was to devise the most practical and effective machinery, and on this basis I had little difficulty in securing general agreement. As my colleagues will have seen from the published communique (a copy of which is attached) it was decided that, whereas the five Foreign Ministers should meet at least once every three months in each of the capitals of the signatory States in turn, the Permanent Organ of the Council and the Secretariat, as well as the bodies responsible for military matters, should be established in London. This arrangement, which represents a compromise with the French view, ensures, however, that the main political and military work will be done in London. The obligation to hold a meeting of Foreign Ministers every three months in a different capital may involve some inconvenience, but I assented to it in the belief that it will be a valuable means of ensuring harmony and of giving the necessary impetus to the development of Western Union. Similarly the provision which has been made for meetings between the Ministers concerned in the various fields specified in the Treaty (economic, financial, social, cultural) will help to keep the policies of the Governments in line and to serve the common purpose.

4. The other Foreign Ministers, particularly M. Bidault, were naturally much concerned with recent events in Europe. In consequence emphasis was laid on the urgent need for an early examination of the military situation. It was felt that whilst American support was essential and every effort should be made to secure it, the five Powers should simultaneously initiate military conversations designed to build up gradually a combined military force and a single defensive organisation for all the Treaty Powers. Evidence that Europe was helping itself was the most promising means of bringing about American participation in the defence of the West. It was also agreed that M. Bidault and myself should address a joint message to Mr. Marshall recalling our exchange of messages in March, informing him of the results of this further meeting in Paris and emphasising the importance of arranging without delay the conversations envisaged by Mr. Marshall between the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Benelux. A message in this sense was subsequently drafted in concert with the French and despatched the same day.

5. I then pointed out that, although I accepted the importance of pushing on with the military conversations, I attached equal importance to the other aspects of co-operation for which provision had been made in the Treaty. In particular, if the idea of Western Union was to grow amongst our peoples, it was necessary to show the ordinary man that Western Union had something for him. Incidentally M. Bidault suggested that the five Powers should organise a joint Social Services Exhibition and I think that this idea should be further explored. In general my views found ready acceptance. It was recognised that at this stage it might not be desirable to have permanent committees dealing with economic, financial, social and cultural affairs, but that the most practical course would be to organise meetings, at all events in the first instance on an ad hoc basis, as has been done in the case of the financial talks which open at The Hague next week.

6. The first meeting of the Permanent Organisation in London (the four Ambassadors and a representative appointed by His Majesty's Government) will take place on 26th April. Their first tasks will be to appoint a secretary and to put the military conversations in train. It will also be necessary to broach social and cultural problems at an early date, but pending the conclusion of the financial talks it does not seem likely that economic problems will arise.

7. In general I received the impression that the five Powers are concerned to make the Treaty an instrument of genuine co-operation and that provided they receive some assurance that the problem of security will be tackled, they will pursue with resolution the course on which they have embarked. I believe that the agreement which was reached in Paris provides practical and efficient machinery for the realisation of our aims.

E.B.

Foreign Office, S.W. 1.

20th April, 1948.

ANNEX

The five Foreign Ministers of the signatory Powers of the Brussels Treaty met in Paris on 17th April, 1948, in consultative council under the terms of Article VII, and agreed on the following arrangements with a view to ensuring the implementation of the agreement of 17th March:

- (1) The permanent consultative council shall be composed of the five Foreign Ministers. The council will meet in each of the capitals of the signatory States in turn whenever such a meeting is deemed necessary, and in any case at least once every three months.
- (2) The permanent organ of the council shall be composed of the diplomatic representatives of Belgium, France, Luxembourg and Holland in London, and the representative appointed for this purpose by His Majesty's Government. It will be assisted by a secretariat. It will meet at least once a month.
- (3) The security problems envisaged in the treaty shall normally be handled by the responsible Ministers of the different countries, who will meet in London to discuss them whenever this is deemed necessary. In order to pursue the study of these same questions a permanent military committee shall be set up in London under the authority of the council and under the control of the political representatives mentioned in paragraph two.
- (4) The council shall decide on periodical meetings, in a place to be designated, of Ministers or competent experts to deal with economic, social and cultural questions. In order to pursue the task undertaken at these meetings, the council shall decide to set up special committees to this end.
- (5) All the committees mentioned above shall report to the consultative council.

G. R.

97