

CONSEIL DE L'ATLANTIQUE NORD
NORTH ATLANTIC COUNCIL

357

NATO UNCLASSIFIED
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EXEMPLAIRE
COPY N°

ORIGINAL: FRENCH
10th September, 1954

~~NATO SECRET~~
~~DOCUMENT~~
C-M(54)71

STATEMENT BY MR. MENDES-FRANCE,

Chairman of the North Atlantic Council,
at the meeting of the North Atlantic Council
held on 9th September, 1954

Gentlemen, it is a pleasure for me to be with you today. You know that it has long been my intention to meet the Permanent Council. It is only because I was fully occupied with other tasks that I have not been able to come sooner. In a few days' time the Chairmanship of the Atlantic Council will be taken over by my Greek colleague, to whom I now extend my warmest and most cordial good wishes. That is why I wanted to come and preside, if only for a few minutes, over one of your meetings in the Palais de Chaillot which you will soon be leaving to move into your new quarters which, I trust, will be erected with all speed and which will bear testimony to the permanence of our alliance and to our lasting solidarity.

I should like to take this opportunity of paying tribute to the work of your Secretary General, Lord Ismay, who directs your endeavours so skilfully and so shrewdly, and of once more assuring him of the trust we place in him. I know that I am voicing the true feelings of all the governments represented on this Council. I assume that, at this time when we are faced with grave problems which directly concern the future and the development of the Atlantic Alliance, you would wish the Head of the French Government to give you some indications and impressions on the position in which we are placed and on the prospects which are now opening up before us.

I shall speak of them very simply and frankly, in keeping with the atmosphere of confidence which reigns at your meetings. I recently stated in our Parliament that the French Government intended to base its policy on the maintenance and reinforcement of the Atlantic Alliance. This statement received the enthusiastic approval of the members of the House - both those who were against and those who supported the idea of the European Defence Community. In neither the Government nor in Parliament can there be any doubt of France's support of this Alliance which is for us, as for the countries which you represent, a vital necessity and the basis of our foreign policy. For 4 years we have been studying the problem of Germany's contribution to common defence. I know how anxious your governments were for agreement to be reached on the broad aspects of this question and, as I said before the National Assembly, I can well understand how disappointed they were not to receive an earlier response from France. I fully realise that the result of the recent vote in the French Parliament was a disappointment to many of you. You know that I am doing all in my power to arrive at a rapid, rational and satisfactory solution to this serious problem. My endeavours have not been successful owing to widespread misunderstanding of the true attitude of the French Parliament. I repeated to my colleagues in Brussels a statement I have frequently made in the past, that there was not a parliamentary majority in favour of the EDC in France. If I had been believed and if the necessary conclusions had been drawn, there would have been a clearer appreciation of the need for the proposals which my

Government put forward and which were the only hope of winning over a certain number of deputies whose support I wished to gain.

However, gentlemen, though the Brussels Conference did not enable us to reach the desired agreement, it proved that the views of the six governments represented were identical as regards the vital aims they wished to achieve. The dangers facing these six countries are common to all of them, the difficulties they are encountering are similar, their determination to work out together, in full agreement with their allies, an effective system providing for the particular circumstances of each, is as strong as ever.

This agreement on essential principles is faithfully reflected in the communiqué issued at the end of the Conference, and this impression was confirmed during the conversation I had with Chancellor Adenauer after the Conference.

We now have to look for alternative solutions. The matter is urgent: that is why I welcomed the proposal for a Nine-Power Conference. Despite the fact that it has been adjourned, we can be certain that there will be other opportunities for exchanges of views.

They will of course be followed by a Ministerial Meeting of the Atlantic Council at which our governments would have to find a solution acceptable to all.

I trust that this time we shall not waste three years drafting and approving texts which, I feel, should be both precise and concise. In any case, as soon as they have been drawn up, I shall submit them to the National Assembly so that it can vote on them without delay. If any more time is lost it will not be the fault of my Government.

You will understand that I am not in a position today to tell you how I think the problem of the German contribution could be solved. Several suggestions have been put forward and given sufficient publicity for you to be aware of their essential points. They will be discussed at meetings which we shall be holding shortly. As I have this opportunity of addressing you, I should like to stress certain points which have emerged from the events of the past few weeks. First I think I can say that, as you now realise, the re-militarisation of Germany, in any form whatever, raises apprehensions in France. The reasons are easily understood. We need the evidence of ever closer Atlantic solidarity to help us allay these fears. This leads me to say that, in my opinion, one of the conclusions to be drawn from the debate which caused such an agonising rift in my country is that the people of France need to be assured of the support of as many of their allies as possible in this task of organizing the defence of Europe with the participation of Germany. I am convinced that one of the main reasons why the European Defence Community Treaty was rejected by the French Parliament was that a large sector of public opinion was not prepared to sacrifice any part of French sovereignty in fields which closely affect the structure of the State and a country's own prerogatives. It found it all the more difficult to approve this step as it felt that the sacrifices it was asked to make were not sufficiently shared by others.

I have often heard it recalled that the European Defence Community was a French idea and people are surprised that France should destroy what it had itself proposed. I can understand that

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surprise, but it should not be forgotten that France had, during recent years, also put forward other suggestions aimed primarily at strengthening the Atlantic Alliance and providing our organization with more powerful and effective means of defence through ever closer co-operation of our efforts. I am thinking more particularly of the fact that in 1951, in Ottawa, the Atlantic Council had approved the principle of a European Defence Community within the framework of a steadily expanding Atlantic Community. I am fully aware that, since then, our Alliance has increased its defensive strength and that there have been considerable improvements in our civilian and military organizations, but, without referring specifically here to any of the plans we had submitted, you know that it would have been our wish to go even further.

In speaking of the defensive strength of our Alliance, I should like to refer briefly to the work upon which you are now engaged and which concerns the programmes for 1955. As soon as my Government was formed, it set about preparing as realistically as possible the recommendations and data which it was to submit to you. This work has been delayed by a series of events which are well known to you. We were unaware of the turn affairs in the Far East would take. We were not sure what would be the extent of our commitments in North Africa. There were a number of grave and uncertain factors which prevented our giving as precise a reply as we should have liked. But the uncertainty to which I have just referred is now being dissipated and already this week a number of inter-ministerial meetings have been or are to be held, which will enable us shortly to let you have the replies for which you are now waiting.

Gentlemen, although German contribution to defence constitutes an important resource from which we shall all benefit, it is only right that we should all assume joint responsibility for the measures to be taken to ensure that such German participation shall contribute to the stability of our Alliance and to the peace of Europe and the world. Success depends upon that. We must not lose sight of the fact that the participation of the Federal Republic in common defence must be framed and organized in such a way that the solutions proposed may find wide support in public opinion. It would be impracticable to seek to increase our strength by concentrating solely on the military field at the expense of the political solidarity founded on the support freely given by the large majority of our people to the common defence undertaking which has its roots in the North Atlantic Treaty. These are general ideas from which I ask you not to draw too definite a conclusion as yet regarding the intentions of the French Government. These will be defined and announced in due course. All I can say now is that a satisfactory solution to the problem of German rearmament can be found only through ever closer co-operation within our Alliance and by equal sharing of the responsibilities incumbent upon us. When, in the near future, we resume the talks which the new situation calls for, we hope that the necessary decisions will emerge which will enable the countries of Western Europe to enter into commitments providing the public with the security and the guarantees which they demand. Neither shall we forget at that time the prime necessity of doing everything possible to further Franco-German reconciliation and co-operation within the European framework, by resolving not only the major problems to which I have already referred but also those in abeyance between our two countries, such as economic questions, the Saar problem and exchanges on cultural matters. Finally, it is my sincere hope that, in the difficult situation with which we are

faced, there may be found still further reasons for tightening the bonds which unite all our countries and for reaffirming here, for the benefit of those who speculate on our dissension, our determination to pursue our common endeavours.

Before I close, I should like to say a word on a subject which you have already discussed: I am referring to the proposals which we received from the Soviet Government. We shall lose no opportunity of resuming any talks with that Government which seem likely to prove fruitful. But before we start such talks we must have a firm hope that they will lead to something. So far, however, there are no signs that the Soviet Union has, particularly in respect of German problems, made any change in an attitude which, as the Berlin Conference showed, could only render agreement impossible. No real easing of the international situation can be achieved except on realistic foundations which at the moment are lacking. I am convinced that the prospects of an improvement in the situation will increase with the growth of our co-operation and solidarity - and therein lies our duty. The French Government, on whose behalf I have the honour to speak, will do all in its power to bring to your work its most wholehearted, sincere and zealous contribution.