

# COUNCIL OF EUROPE CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

## COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

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### POLITICAL DIALOGUE



Organisation and preparation

Secretariat memorandum  
prepared by the Directorate of Political Affairs

### Introduction

1. Following the adoption by the Committee of Ministers of Resolution (84)21 on the action of the Council of Europe in the political field the Secretary General has submitted in document CM(85)96 a series of comments and suggestions for the improvement of the preparation of the political dialogue within the Committee of Ministers. The Ministers' Deputies held a first exchange of views on this question at their 387th meeting (June 1985, item 2); they asked the Secretary General to submit in the light of their discussions and written observations from delegations a new document which could serve as a starting point for their deliberations at the 388th meeting in September 1985.

2. This document has been drawn up in accordance with this request. It is also designed to meet the wish that the debate be concentrated at this stage on a selection of concrete questions so that practical measures can be established as soon as possible ensuring the development and deepening of the political dialogue (1).

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(1) See also the parts of the report of the Colombo Commission of 12 June 1985 devoted to the political dialogue.

3. Discussions held so far have demonstrated that in the philosophy of Resolution (84)21 the political dialogue should be organised along two lines. First of all, according to the level at which it is held: Committee of Ministers at the Ministerial level, Ministers' Deputies, Political Directors and, possibly, the Assembly. Secondly, according to the subject: bearing in mind the various aims related to the different objectives listed in Resolution (84)21 and leaving aside possible contributions to the solution of problems existing between member States (which will in any case not be covered by programming of a general character) one may distinguish between dialogue on the political aspects of the construction of Europe and dialogue on international problems.

4. The latter calls for an important comment: political dialogue between the 21 on international problems of common interest to them should enable the member States to consult together and to provide pointers for their foreign policies; however, while the importance of efforts at approximation of positions and action of the member States with regard to major problems of international politics should be stressed, in particular with regard to developments which concern the principles of the Council of Europe, one should also recognise, having regard to the impossibility of a general harmonisation, that it would be most useful and constructive if the member States would agree to the principle of consultations on the whole range of topical international problems (except of course defence problems). As far as the position taken by member States in other international organisations or fora is concerned (1) one should also take duly into account the variety of roles and functions assumed by our member States: co-ordination within the Council of Europe should not endanger the positive aspects of this differentiation.

5. Dialogue on the political aspects of the building of Europe (which includes issues facing European society and threats to European ideals and cohesion) should in particular aim at achieving, having taken into consideration the action of the European Community, a better orientation of intergovernmental activities following a redefinition of priorities and the strengthening of the political dimension of those activities.

6. On the basis of these preliminary remarks this document will list below practical measures which could be taken at the different levels of the political dialogue in order to give it greater substance, and to make it more timely and operational.

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(1) Cf the proposal of the Colombo Commission concerning the co-ordination of the position taken by member States in larger international bodies.

I. Political dialogue at the level of the Ministers'  
Deputies

7. By virtue of their permanent status and global terms of reference within the structure of the Organisation the Ministers' Deputies play a key role in the political dialogue both on international problems and on the construction of Europe. Working closely together with committees of experts and Conferences of specialised Ministers and with the help of their sectorial rapporteur groups and the Secretariat, the Deputies can select those matters relating to the Council of Europe activities which should be treated within the framework of the political dialogue, either in preparation of discussions at the Ministerial level or with a view to permitting the Deputies themselves to arrive at conclusions. Moreover the Deputies should be in a position to raise and to examine in a more systematic and thorough manner questions of international politics which come under the political dialogue.

8. A decisive role is played in this connection by the Chair, assisted whenever possible by the delegations of the previous Chair and the next Chair (Bureau) in close contact with the Secretary General. Furthermore the following measures might be envisaged in order to start the political dialogue in a pragmatic manner:

- a. It is open to the rapporteur groups to carry out, each in its own sector, a political evaluation of intergovernmental activities and programmes and to report on their conclusions to the Deputies.
- b. At every Deputies' meeting one full day or one or two half days scheduled in advance might be reserved for questions coming under the political dialogue.
- c. Such questions might be determined in advance either by the Deputies themselves or by the Chairman (or as the case may be by the Bureau) and the corresponding agenda items might be specifically pointed out in the draft agendas.
- d. One might add an additional item entitled "Other questions for the political dialogue" under which any delegation as well as the Secretary General could raise any question (particularly any question concerning international politics) which in their opinion calls for an exchange of views under the political dialogue. Whenever possible prior notice should be given of such initiatives by means of a written communication to the heads of delegation indicating briefly the content and main aspects of the suggestion (such a communication might perhaps be made on a document without a reference number) (1).

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(1) In order to avoid any confusion in case this suggestion is accepted the agenda item which is at present entitled "Dialogue with the Secretary General" might be renamed "Communication by the Secretary General" it being understood that under this heading the Secretary General will bring up in particular administrative matters or information on recent events of interest to the Deputies whilst his initiatives or questions coming under the political dialogue should be reserved for the agenda item carrying the latter heading.

- e. The questions under political dialogue which result from a new initiative or are in an early discussion stage might be dealt with under a less formal procedure, in particular with regard to documentation required and to records.
  - f. The Secretariat might be instructed to keep an inventory of all questions treated in the context of the political dialogue which concern international problems of common interest and to open summary files on these problems with the help of delegations (which might wish to contribute to them voluntarily by communicating - if necessary unofficially - any element of useful information to the Chairman or to the Secretariat).
  - g. The delegation of the country holding the Chair of the Council of the Communities might be requested to communicate regularly either to the Chairman or to the Secretary General the conclusions of the European Political Co-operation (EPC) between the member countries of the Community and, as far as possible, to give indications on matters which are being examined in the framework of the EPC.
9. Meetings with the participation of experts from the capitals constitute an important element of the political dialogue. Up to now such meetings have been held more or less regularly on the CSCE (and various meetings held in its framework), United Nations and North/South relations. In order to make these meetings even more useful both for the Committee of Ministers and for their participants it seems appropriate to give thought to the following questions:
- a. The preparation of meetings of experts might be improved: themes, which should be formulated with greater precision and should be topical and relevant, to be determined by the Deputies with the assistance of the experts themselves (these might for example be invited to indicate at the end of their meeting their preferences for a further meeting), basic documents might be prepared by the Chair, one or more delegations and whenever possible the Secretariat).
  - b. Experts might be asked to draw up for the information of the Committee of Ministers and the member governments a succinct resumé of their discussions and, where appropriate, of their conclusions.
  - c. The possibility should not be ruled out of the national experts getting together amongst themselves on the occasions of their meetings in Strasbourg, provided however that their links with the work of the Deputies are ensured (for example via the Deputies' Chairman).

- d. If need be one should not exclude the possibility of convening national experts outside Strasbourg (for example in New York for exchanges of views on specific items being discussed in United Nations, etc).
- e. Questions other than those mentioned above might if necessary and, where appropriate, be submitted on an ad hoc basis to meetings of experts from the capitals by decision of the Deputies.

10. It goes without saying that the development of the political dialogue at the Deputies' level requires a parallel effort on their part at concentrating their discussions and agendas. Means for achieving this have been indicated in the course of the previous work on working methods and the Deputies have already begun implementing them: more frequent application of the procedure of tacit adoption or without debate, remitting a larger number of questions to the meetings of Deputy Permanent Representatives (B level), better planning of forthcoming meetings.

## II. Sessions of the Committee of Ministers at Ministerial level

11. Ministerial sessions being the main occasion for political dialogue within the Committee of Ministers, it should be made sure that deliberations at this level should be as much as possible dedicated to political dialogue in its different dimensions ie the construction of Europe as well as international problems. This could be achieved by reducing considerably matters of an administrative or purely routine nature.

12. As in the past, Ministerial sessions provide an opportunity for informal meetings of Ministers which are devoted in particular to exchanges of views on topical international problems. The themes are proposed by the Chairman who may wish to contact on this question his predecessor and successor in office ("Troika"). Perhaps it would be possible to define subjects with greater precision having taken into account the work going on in the framework of the political dialogue of the Deputies, of national experts and in particular of the Political Directors (see below). The Chairman, whenever he considers it advisable to do so, would always be free to furnish at the formal sessions of the Ministers information on the informal dialogue between Ministers.

13. For Ministerial sessions one might henceforth envisage an agenda which is limited to the political dialogue on two or three questions which have been well defined and well prepared and which touch on

- i. political aspects of the construction of Europe;
- ii. challenges to European society;
- iii. current problems of international politics.

One should not abandon however the practice of progress reports on the state of the construction of Europe (by the Secretary General and by the Chairmen of the Council of the Communities and EFTA): these reports, which would not appear on the agenda under any general agenda item and would not call for general comments, could serve as supporting documentation and as reference documents for discussion on specific questions, in particular those selected under i. and ii. above.

14. Ministers' deliberations should be carefully prepared by the Deputies not so much in order to solve beforehand all problems but rather in order to constitute a file which outlines the nature and different implications of the given problem and indicates the contentious issues as well as options for possible conclusions to be drawn by Ministers. In this manner the Chairman would have a useful scenario for conducting a genuine and open debate which offers the possibility of arriving at new and fruitful results when carrying on the Council of Europe's action.

15. Several other questions might be examined with a view to making a better use of Ministerial sessions for the political dialogue such as:

- a. the organisation of restricted sessions (Ministers, Permanent Representatives and Political Directors) for certain debates;
- b. the convening of special meetings of Ministers with a view to examining specific urgent questions (following the example of the meeting of 29 January 1985);
- c. the holding of a Conference of specialised Ministers on the occasion of a session of the Committee of Ministers and vice versa (1).

### III. Meetings of Political Directors

16. These meetings have become of late a much appreciated element of the political dialogue within the Council of Europe in particular because they have enabled the establishing of links with European Political Co-operation (EPC) of the member States of the European Community. It would seem that themes to be raised during such meetings, although they concentrate on problems of international politics, should not a priori exclude questions concerning the construction and politics of Europe. More generally it would also seem that these meetings might become even more important if the initiative for the themes to be discussed would be shared between the countries which are members of the Community and those which are not.

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(1) Cf the proposal of the Colombo Commission concerning integration of Conferences of specialised Ministers within the institutional framework of the Council of Europe.

17. The dates and frequency of meetings of Political Directors do not seem to have been finally settled yet. Several formulae are possible:

- a. making these meetings coincide with the informal meeting of Ministers on the occasion of each session of the Committee of Ministers: in this case one should avoid as much as possible an overlapping of subjects discussed;
- b. holding these meetings on the occasion of the Ministerial session but at a time when the Ministers are not in session (formally nor informally): in this case one might take advantage of the work of Political Directors for preparing the discussions between Ministers on the understanding that information and possible conclusions should be transmitted from one body to the other;
- c. organising meetings of Political Directors of the 21 in addition to those held during Ministerial sessions, for example concurrently with and at the meeting place of the Political Committee of the EPC: this might offer an opportunity for exchanges of views on topical questions, and for giving a follow-up to discussions which have already started or preparing political dialogue envisaged for the next session of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

18. Finally meetings of Political Directors might be of growing importance for the political dialogue if it were possible to give them a follow-up at other levels of the same dialogue, particularly at the level of the Ministers' Deputies. For this purpose one should arrive at an agreement on an acceptable method of information on the content of discussions of Political Directors either by the Chairman of the Committee or with the help of the Secretariat.

#### IV. Political dialogue and the Assembly

19. The need of developing links between the Assembly and the political dialogue within the Committee of Ministers is universally recognised; but the best possible methods for arriving at this without running the risk of "mixing up the institutions" still have to be found.

20. The arrangements listed below might be more frequently resorted to in order to enhance reciprocally the importance and impact of the political dialogue of the Committee of Ministers and the political debate in the Assembly (1):

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- (1) In this context mention should be made of the proposals of the Colombo Commission concerning the organisation of regular debates in the Assembly on the progress of the construction of Europe, "with participation by the Committee of Ministers".

- a. tripartite meetings between the Chairman of the Committee of Ministers (and/or the Chairman of the Deputies), the President of the Assembly (and/or the Chairman of a parliamentary committee) and the Secretary General: these meetings would be particularly helpful for synchronising, as much as possible and desirable, the dialogue of the Committee of Ministers and the political debate of the Assembly
- b. exchanges of views with the President of the Assembly (and/or the Chairman of a parliamentary committee) during a meeting of the Ministers' Deputies
- c. combining the presentation of the Statutory Report to the Assembly by the Chairman of the Committee of Ministers with a parliamentary debate on a theme of the political dialogue (possibly with the participation of Ministers from other member States)
- d. Joint Committee with participation of Ministers (colloquy) and/or Deputies in Strasbourg and/or during the mini-session of the Assembly (as in Hamburg in July 1985)
- e. exchanges of views during meetings of the Political Committee of the Assembly with the Chairman of the Committee of Ministers or his Deputy
- f. exchanges of views between parliamentary committees and relevant rapporteur groups of the Ministers' Deputies.