Memorandum of a Cabinet discussion on foreign policy in Europe, dated 8 January 1948

[…]

Foreign Policy in Europe

5. The cabinet had before them the following memoranda by the Foreign Secretary: -

C.P. (48) 7: containing a review of Soviet policy.

C.P. (47) 313: on the extinction of human rights in Eastern Europe

C.P. (48) 6: outlining a policy for fostering a political union of Western European countries.

C.P. (48) 8: on future foreign publicity policy.

The *Foreign Secretary* said that the United States’ proposals for assisting the economic recovery of Europe had crystallised the opposition of the Soviet Government to any closer organisation of the democratic States of Western Europe, and it was clear that although the recent Soviet attempts to stir up trouble in France and Italy had largely failed, some closer form of union should be created in Western Europe in order to resist the increasing penetration of Soviet influence. It would have been premature to take action in this direction before the recent meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers, but the breakdown of that conference and the encouraging progress made with the plans for European recovery, towards what the United Kingdom Government had made such an important contribution had opened the way for an attempt to secure a greater measure of co-operation among the countries of Western Europe. It would be necessary to mobilise the resources of Africa in support of any Western European union; and, if some such union could be created, including not only the countries of Western Europe but their Colonial possessions in Africa and the East, this would form a *bloc* which, both in population and productive capacity, could stand on an equality with the western hemisphere and Soviet *blocs.*

In discussion there was general support for the proposals that positive steps should be taken to consolidate the force of the Western European countries and their Colonial possessions. The following points were made: -

(a) It was important that in the execution of the policy outlined in C.P. (48) 6 too much emphasis should not be laid on its anti-Soviet aspect. A policy which gained the unanimous support of the Press and public opinion of the Right would fail to rally the Socialist forces in Western Europe and would make it more difficult to foster cultural and trade relations with Eastern European countries, which, though dominated politically by Communists, still had a western outlook. The danger of pursuing a policy which concentrated on opposition to the Soviet Government was illustrated by events in Greece, where it had not been found possible to strengthen the influence of the centre parties. Doubts were also expressed about the suggestion in C.P. (48) 6 that Portugal should be included in the western democratic system.

In reply, *the Foreign Secretary* said that it would be impossible for him to give an effective lead without being critical of Soviet policy, but it was his intention to concentrate mainly on the positive and constructive side of his proposals. So far as Greece was concerned, every effort had been made to encourage the centre Parties, but they had proved incapable of forming a stable Government. The inclusion of Portugal in any Western European union would be most important because of her Colonial possessions in Africa. There was no intention of attempting to bring Spain into the union so long as the Franco Government continued in power.

(b) The most effective method of countering Soviet propaganda was to provide specific information refuting the misrepresentations made by the Soviet Government. The Prime Minister’s recent broadcast illustrated how this could be combined with encouragement of Socialist principles.

(c) It would be necessary to work out more precisely the purposes for which a closer union of Western Europe was to be advocated. Co-operation might be for the purpose of defence or in the economic or cultural fields; but, unless some positive point of focus were devised, it would be difficult to make any satisfactory progress. It might be advisable, in the first instance, to try to work out the basic principles of co-operation and advise on the lines which propaganda should follow.

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