Foreign Office memorandum by E. Bevin, ‘Discussions in Paris regarding Germany’, 23 May 1946[[1]](#footnote-1)

SECRET

C.P. (46) 207

23 May, 1946

CABINET

COUNCIL OF FOREIGN MINISTERS

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs

DISCUSSIONS IN PARIS REGARDING GERMANY

It was unfortunately impossible to make much progress in Paris either on general questions relation to Germany or on the special question of the Ruhr.

There were useful discussions with French experts at the official level about the methods of industrial control in the Ruhr. An agreed report was drawn up, the conclusion of which is that once a decision has been taken on the fundamental question whether the Ruhr should be political separated from Germany it should not be difficult to reconcile any divergences between the British and French authorities on the method of application of the control to the Ruhr mines and industries under whatever plan is approved in principle.

The Secretary of State had a long conversation with the French Foreign Minister. M. Bidault restated the French case for the political separation of the Ruhr, Rhineland and Saar from Germany and for the immediate creation of a new State of the Ruhr under international government. The Secretary of State took the line that he had great sympathy with the French security requirements but was unable to take a definite line for or against the political separation of the Ruhr for the time being, particularly before the French elections as he was not sure that some of the French parties might not change their attitude on this question after the election. The Secretary of State also emphasised strongly the wish of His Majesty’s Government that the British zone commander[[2]](#footnote-2) in Germany should not be put in an inferior position and that the British zone should not be singled out for special measures of international control. We were proposing to go ahead with setting up a new province in the Ruhr and then to consider whether the industries should be taken over by the provincial government or held in trust by the British commander.

The discussion then turned to the level of industry in Germany and when the Secretary of State said that it would be impossible to carry out his aims for the positive development of Ruhr industries to serve European and world needs if they started in a more or less bankrupt position. M. Bidault agreed that it might be necessary to modify the original French proposal that if a separate territory was set up in the Ruhr area the level of industry agreed in Berlin would not be affected. But he maintained that the economic arguments which had been put forward against political separation were not valid, since some of the profits made in the Ruhr could be used to pay for German imports.

There were some useful discussions on the official levy with members of the American State Department whose views seemed to be very much in line with ours.

At the meetings of Foreign Ministers there was a brief reference to Germany early on when Mr. Byrnes produced the American proposals for a 25-year treaty to ensure the disarmament of Germany. This was badly received by the Russians who said that they were more interested in ensuring that the immediate disarmament of Germany laid down in the Potsdam Agreement was being carried out. German questions were only discussed at any length in the last two days of the Conference. M. Bidault developed the usual French thesis about the Ruhr, Rhineland and Saar. The Secretary of State said that the discussion should be on Germany as a whole. He could not discuss one part only as it was first necessary to know whether Germany was to be a centralised or federalised State. Moreover it was impossible to take any definite decision without consulting the other Powers who were closely concerned. Mr. Byrnes then put forward a proposal that special deputies should be appointed to consider five questions: -

(1) Will consideration be given to the internationalisation of the Ruhr and Rhineland?

(2) Will German resources be made available for Germany as a whole (i.e., will the proceeds of exports be available to pay for imports of Germany as a whole)?

(3) The question of setting up administrative machinery to permit Germany to be treated as an economic unit.

(4) The removal of zonal boundaries.

(5) The final limits of Germany in the west.

Mr. Byrnes proposed that recommendations on these questions should be put before the Council of Foreign Ministers at its next session in June. He also proposed that the special deputies should study the question of making a treaty with Germany and that the Council of Foreign Ministers should submit a draft peace settlement to a peace conference on the 12th November. He emphasised that this did not imply that there should at that time be a German Government ready to accept a treaty.

M. Molotov then made a long statement emphasising the importance of the Ruhr and reverting to the proposal made by the Soviet Delegation about the Ruhr at Potsdam (that it should be treated as part of Germany and controlled by a special four-Power body similar to the Control Council in Berlin). He also complained that he did not received enough information about what was going on in the Ruhr. The Secretary of State replied that His Majesty’s Government would supply the Control Council with any information it might require and that we should equally like to know what was happening in the Russian zone.

At the next meeting M. Bidault made another plea that before submitting the whole German problem to the deputies a decision should be taken about the Saar. Mr. Byrnes said he had no objection to the French proposals about the Saar if the French would agree about setting up central administrations in Germany. The Secretary of State reverted to his view that Germany must be treated as a whole and mentioned that while some of Mr. Byrnes’s questions referred to the Ruhr and western boundaries of Germany the eastern boundary had also not been finally settled and that the deputies should consider all boundaries. Similarly they should consider the whole of German industry and the question whether any part of it in any zone should be internationalised. The Secretary of State was unable to give a direct answer about the Saar but agreed that the deputies should take it up as an urgent measure. The Secretary of State also queried the date proposed for a peace conference. There was some further inconclusive and general discussion in the course of which M. Molotov questioned whether Mr. Byrnes’s proposal was intended to upset the Potsdam decision which had in fact dealt with all the fundamental issues in Germany. Mr. Byrnes made a statement defending the American proposal for a 25-year treaty and said that he would never have put this forward unless he had received Stalin’s’ prior approval in principle. M. Bidault provided a revised set of questions to be put to the deputies which altered the emphasis but not to any great extent the substance of the ‘American’ proposals.

The final meeting was brief. Mr. Byrnes put a direct question to M. Molotov whether he could now say whether he agreed that special deputies should be appointed to consider German problems, leaving the terms of reference for later discussion. M. Molotov replied that the Soviet Government had not been able to study these questions which were new to them. Mr Byrnes then said that he wished to revise the second part of his proposals by providing for a “general Allied conference” instead of a “peace conference”, and that the date of the conference should not be fixed now but should be fixed by the Council of Foreign Ministers at its next meeting. Mr. Bidault said that subject to a reservation with regard to the terms of reference he agreed to the proposal. The Secretary of State said that he agreed to the appointment of special deputies and proposed the following resolution: -

“That was appoint special deputies to examine the whole problem of Germany; to study the implementation of the Berlin decisions’ to study proposals to lead up to the preparation of a peace treaty and the fixing of frontiers; to take into account the views expressed at this conference on Germany and its future, and to present an interim report at the meeting on the 15th June.”

In reply to another question from Mr. Byrnes, M. Molotov repeated that he could not agree to the establishment of the machinery proposed by the United States Delegation. In view of this the session was closed.

The Council of Foreign Ministers is meeting again on the 15th June and the discussion on Germany will no doubt be continued. The Secretary of State intends to ensure that whatever machinery is set up an early opportunity should be given to the other Powers concerned to express their opinions about the peace settlement with Germany. His idea is that after initial consideration by the special deputies of the four Foreign Ministers a preliminary meeting should be held of all the other Powers concerned (perhaps to be defined as those who have military missions in Berlin) to have a general discussion on these and any other problems. After that a draft peace settlement might be prepared by the Council of Foreign Ministers for submission to a general peace conference[[3]](#footnote-3).

[TNA, CAB 129/10]

Keywords: inter-allied relations, post-war Germany

1. The memorandum was sent out to members of the Cabinet. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Douglas, William Sholto (1893 – 1969) – British Air Marshal. Air Officer Commander-in-Chief, British Air Forces of Occupation in Germany (1945 – 1946), Military Governor and Commander-in-Chief of British zone of occupation in Germany (1946 – 1947). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. On the next day, 24 May, a supplementary memorandum from Bevin (dated 22 May) was sent to members of the Cabinet about the progress of discussions at the Paris session of the Council of Foreign Ministers. Bevin’s general message was fairly optimistic: ‘In general, more work has been done on the five Peace Treaties than has been apparent. The military subjects of four of the five Peace Treaties have been practically completed and the various viewpoints of such subjects as the Italian Colonies and reparation have been brought somewhat nearer agreement.’ (C.P. (46) 208, Memo by Bevin, 22/05/1946 // TNA, CAB 129/10). In July Bevin’s assessment of the actions of the Soviet delegation in Paris had become significantly harsher (see: C.M. (46) 68th Conclusions, 15/07/1946 // TNA, CAB 128/6). At the Cabinet meeting of 25 July, the British minister spoke about how ‘the Russians had refused to agree to implement the basic provisions of the Berlin Agreement regarding the treatment of Germany as an economic whole’ and he persuaded the Cabinet to adopt the American proposal on the economic unification of the American and British zones of occupation (C.M. (46) 73rd Conclusions, 25/07/1946 // TNA, CAB 128/6). Semenov wrote back in March 1946 about the attempts ‘of the British and Americans to establish an actual economic whole (a “union”) out of their zones’ (SSSR i germanskii vopros. Т. 2. S. 385). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)