

NATO Ministers agreed in Bonn to accept the invitation of the Finnish Government to hold multilateral preparatory talks in Helsinki to prepare for a Conference on Security and Co-operation. The exact date on which the European countries, the United States and Canada will sit down to talk about a conference will have to be set by mutual agreement among the potential participants. With other NATO members Canada will now move to engage other interested countries in planning for this phase.

I should emphasize that a decision to convoke a formal conference has not yet been taken. That decision will depend on the outcome of the preparatory talks. The aim of NATO countries at these talks will be to ensure that our proposals are fully considered and to establish that enough common ground exists among participants to warrant reasonable expectations that a conference will produce satisfactory results.

For example, we want to see more normal contacts and exchanges between countries of different political and social systems in Europe. To achieve this end, the Conference should deal in a practical way with measures designed to contribute to the freer movement of people, information and ideas. I was not alone in underlining the importance of this consideration at our meeting last week.

On the military side NATO ministers were agreed that certain stabilization measures could usefully be discussed at a conference in order to create confidence on both sides.

In addition to a Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, NATO Ministers devoted considerable attention to the question of mutual and balanced force reductions. Just as we have always considered that progress in East-West political détente must be measured in terms of practical results, especially on the Berlin problem, so we believe that any real improvement in security in Europe will remain illusory unless it is accompanied by some reduction in the concentration of military power in the area.

This is not to say that force reductions should be negotiated at a conference. It would be impossible in practical terms to carry out negotiations on such a complex matter among the 35 participants in a conference. Preparations for a conference and for MBFR negotiations should, however, proceed as far as possible in parallel. In order that force reductions complement the political achievements of a security conference, talks on the two subjects should be concurrent but separate.