

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, April 14, 1969

The house met at 2 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

NATIONAL DEFENCE

NATO—REPORT ON SPRING MINISTERIAL SESSION

Hon. Léo Cadieux (Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, in the absence of the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Sharp) who would normally report to the house on the spring NATO ministerial session, and because there has been a great deal of interest regarding this particular session, I have undertaken on his behalf to make the following report to hon. members of this house.

With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to table copies in English and French of the communiqué which was issued at the conclusion of the regular spring meeting of ministers which I attended in Washington last Thursday and Friday with the Secretary of State for External Affairs.

Part of the Washington meeting was devoted to commemorating NATO's twentieth anniversary but the ministers showed little inclination to dwell on the past accomplishments of the alliance. Their attention was focused instead on problems of the future, both immediate and long term.

The immediate issue was to decide how to get on with the resolution of east-west problems. Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia had set back hopes for improving east-west relations, but there was agreement in Washington that a continuing dialogue between members of NATO and the Warsaw Pact was the only rational course. NATO's 15 member governments therefore agreed on a policy of gradually renewing contacts with the Warsaw Pact countries and of exploring all possibilities for negotiations that might help resolve their outstanding differences with the east.

The ministers discussed at some length the proposal for a European security conference contained in the communiqué issued by the Warsaw Pact in Budapest on March 17. The

conclusion was that a European security conference as conceived in the Budapest declaration posed serious difficulties, because the proposed terms of reference called for recognizing the continued division of Germany and existing borders in central Europe. To accept in advance the Communist position on these issues would clearly pre-judge the outcome of the conference. A number of the delegations in Washington, including that of Canada, considered that if the east was now seriously interested in the possibility of holding a European security conference, they might be prepared to accept realistic terms of reference. The NATO ministers agreed steps should be taken to test thoroughly the intentions of the eastern European countries, particularly on issues which might be negotiable. There was general agreement that if a conference were held it should include both the United States and Canada.

[Translation]

At the Washington meeting a significant new dimension was added to the ministers' discussions. It was the question of what the members of the alliance might do collectively to assist in the search for solutions of the social problems facing modern societies and in the attempt to close the gap between the prosperous developed countries and those of the developing world. It was acknowledged that many aspects of these questions were already being considered in other international bodies but there was a general disposition to see if NATO could help to find new and better ways of sharing views and experiences on them.

The Canadian delegation's principal aim was to ensure that NATO would use to the full its capacity to contribute to the early improvement of east-west relations. The paper on east-west relations which the ministers had before them was based on a Canadian draft and its conclusions were largely reflected in the results of the meeting.

● (2:10 p.m.)

[English]

In the main Canadian statement which was delivered by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, emphasis was placed not only on