

The French Foreign Minister later spoke in the ministerial meeting of the position taken by the 14. He said the French Government would be pleased if the 14 decided that the Council should remain in Paris but, if it were decided to move the Council, France would understand the reasons. This statement, which is noted in the communiqué, helped to clear the atmosphere. When we do approach this problem again in the autumn, President de Gaulle will have visited the Soviet Union and we shall have a clearer idea of the limits of military co-operation between France and the 14. Then, in reaching our decision, facts rather than expectations can guide us.

If two of the principal achievements of the meetings emerged out of conflict, the third important element -- the emphasis on improving East-West relations -- developed without opposition. Here, I am pleased to report, agreement was complete. All ministers recognized the need to increase bilateral contacts with the countries of Eastern Europe. They saw this as having value in itself and as a necessity for the creation of an atmosphere propitious for the negotiations which must eventually take place on the German settlement. The ministers decided that a report on the possibilities for developing East-West relations should be prepared for their future use.

This unanimity of approach was most encouraging. It demonstrated the extent to which the members of the alliance share a common political outlook, agreeing on the aims of policy and on the prospects for making progress. All members reiterated that a European settlement was our basic objective. But the road to that settlement will be long. It is the intractability of the problems, rather than any lack of will to pursue solutions, which makes progress inevitably slow.

The proof of the measure of agreement and the motives underlying it are expressed in the final communiqué. By the standards of earlier communiqués I regard this communiqué as forward-looking....

The Brussels meeting can, I think, be described as fruitful in the sense that, a week before the meeting began, it seemed that we were headed for a confrontation between France and the 14 which threatened to lead to a complete breach. But a confrontation was avoided and a sense of shared interest prevailed. All countries agreed -- and this is important -- that the maintenance of the Atlantic alliance is as necessary today as ever. They further confirmed that, to this end, its members are pledged, separately and jointly, by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, to maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack.

Our problems are not resolved... -- indeed, the crucial issues have yet to be faced -- but necessary preliminary decisions have been taken. For this we have the alliance and the NATO Council machinery to thank. Once again, this time in new and in many ways more difficult circumstances, the value and the resilience of the alliance were demonstrated. We did our best to avoid unnecessary decisions which could have destroyed the alliance at this stage. We discussed many other problems, including Cyprus, but I have outlined today the essential ones because they involve the unity of the alliance. What the future holds for the 15 has yet to be determined but at any rate, as I have said, we have bought time.