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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

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Resolution expressing an opinion on nuclear and thermonuclear test explosions

Communication

1. 1. Letter from the President of the Assembly of W. E. U, to the President of the Consultative Assembly

14th October 1957

Sir,

I have the honour to send you herewith a resolution, adopted by the Assembly of Western European Union at its Sitting on 14th October, on the basis of a report presented by M. Corniglion-Molinier on behalf of the Committee on Defence Questions and Armaments.

The resolution, which constitutes a reply to your letter of 4th May 1957, deals with the question of nuclear and thermonuclear test explosions.

I am also enclosing with this letter the Explanatory Memorandum prepared by M. Corniglion-Molinier.

I am Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

Signed : J. R. H. HUTCHISON

2. 2. Resolution expressing an opinion on nuclear and thermonuclear test explosions

The Assembly,

Having studied the request for an Opinion on nuclear explosions addressed to i t by the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe,

I

Supports Recommendation 140 (1957) of the Consultative Assembly asking that a Conference of Experts be convened to draw up a report on the nature and magnitude of the risk of radiation which may result from the carrying out of nuclear tests;

Considering that the study at present being undertaken by the United Nations Scientific Committee of the effects of ionizing radiations on human health can in no way dispense the countries of Europe from asking that their most eminent scientists undertake a similar task in order to reach unbiased conclusions within the shortest possible time,

Expresses the opinion :

1. that the experts should also study ways and means of protecting the population of the world from dangerous radiation resulting from atomic piles, cyclotrons and all other installations based on nuclear fission or nuclear fusion;

2. that Member States should be requested to accept this Recommendation in its present amplified form;

II

Having considered the proposal to invite atomic Powers to cease nuclear tests for a limited period, during which proposals tending to control and limit those tests would be examined;

Considering that all measures relating to disarmament in the conventional as well as in the nuclear fields should be closely linked;

Considering that the defence of Western Europe at present mainly depends on the deterrent effect of the nuclear weapons in the possession of the United States. of America and Great Britain;

Conscious of the risk that the West may fall behind the U. S. S. R. in the developmerit of these weapons during an uncontrolled suspension of the tests, which might well remain unilateral;

Considering that a suspension of tests not followed in the near future by the cessation of the production of fissile materials for military purposes would in no way stop the armaments race, owing to the fact that producing countries could continue stockpiling bombs,

Expresses the opinion

1. (a) that an agreement on the suspension of nuclear tests must be concluded within the framework of a general settlement on the limitation and control of armaments, although it could enter into force prior to other provisions of such a general settlement;

(b) that any suspension of tests must be subject to an efficient international control system;

(c) that a suspension of tests must be linked to the cessation of the production of fissile materials for military purposes, coming into force, at the latest, at the end of the period of suspension;

(d) that the cessation of production likewise must be strictly controlled;

2. that the Powers represented at the Disarmament Sub-committee of the United Nations should make as many concessions as possible in order to achieve an agreement before the end of 1957, the principle of which should be that any measure taken should tend to increase the security of all parties concerned and not lead to greater security for some at the expense of the security of others.

3. 3. Explanatory Memorandum (submitted by M. CORNIGLION-MOLINIER, Rapporteur)

1. The text in reply to the request for an Opinion addressed to the Assembly by the Consultative Assembly, which was presented by the Committee on 9th May 1957 (Doc. 55), could not, in the absence of a quorum, be adopted at the end of the May Session. In these circumstances, and at the request of the Bureau, the Committee have re-examined the text in the light of events between May and October. In the course of this examination, your Committee concluded that certain of the provisions of the draft called for amplification.

2. The subject of the request for an Opinion received from the Consultative Assembly (Doc. 52) concerned Recommendation 140, requesting that a Conference of Experts be convened to draw up a Report on the nature and magnitude of the danger to human health from ionizing radiations, as well as Amendment No. 1 presented by Mr. Edwards asking for a general unconditional suspension of nuclear experiments pending a study of the means of control and limitation. With reference to those two distinct problems, the Committee have subdivided the draft in two sections which will be considered separately.

3.1. SECTION I

3. In Section I, the Committee proposed that the Assembly should support Recommendation 140 (1957) of the Consultative Assembly, and also invite scientists to examine ways of protecting populations against dangerous radiations in centres where nuclear energy is being used for peaceful ends. Although the Committee have not yet received the official reply from the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to

that Recommendation, it appears from the statement made by the British Prime Minister in the House of Commons on 9th July 1957 that it is likely to be rejected, in view of the fact that the United Nations has already organised such a Conference.

4. One can question whether transmission to the United Nations without further study, of a question which is very much in the mind of European public opinion is altogether satisfactory. A Committee under United Nations auspices, comprising scientists from Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Egypt, the United States, France, India, Japan, Mexico, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Czechoslovakia and the U. S. S. R., could hardly avoid becoming a forum for propaganda. The conclusions of its deliberations, if any, might be rejected by one State or another on the ground that they are not objective. It is also worth remembering that the Committee will not issue its first Report before 1st July 1958, and that it comprises only four European countries among its fourteen Members.

5. The question whether radioactivity engendered by nuclear explosions is dangerous to mankind raises too grave a moral issue to be dealt with purely on such a basis and at so slow a pace. It is interesting to note that besides the study undertaken by the United Nations in this field, several countries such as the United States of America and Switzerland have done the same work on a national basis, and nothing therefore prevents Members States of the Council of Europe from creating a Committee of European experts.

6. The Committee therefore proposes to the Assembly that it should maintain Section I of the draft and add to it an additional paragraph between the first and second paragraphs.

3.2. SECTION II

7. In Section II of the draft, your Committee rejected the idea of a temporary unconditional suspension of all nuclear experiments. The Committee consider that failing a system of control, such a decision would risk remaining a unilateral one. It is indeed a fact that there does not seem at the present moment to be any adequate means of checking from the outside whether explosions are taking place in the U. S. S. R. No Government could, in the opinion of the Committee, allow the deterrent effect of the existence of the " A " and " H " weapons, which is the best guarantee for the defence of Europe, to be so weakened.

8. The Assembly in its majority shared this point of view when they rejected, at the sitting of 9th May, Amendments 1, 2 and 3 to Section II.

9. Since then, the Western Powers have made their attitude in this matter clear at the Disarmament Sub-committee in London. The overall Western plan relating to measures of partial disarmament, presented on 29th August, links measures relating to conventional weapons closely to those applying to nuclear armaments because, as M. Jules Moch phrased it:

" If a given State thinks itself more powerful than another in the conventional field and less powerful in the nuclear field, it will never agree to a plan providing for the reduction of classical forces as a first step, while leaving untouched the nuclear stockpile, and conversely. "

10. Under this plan, the Western Powers accept the Soviet proposal calling for a 24-month suspension of test explosions, subject to two conditions :

a. that an agreement be concluded instituting a control system providing for points of control on the territories of the U. S. S. R., the United Kingdom, the United States, as well as in the Pacific Ocean area; and that such a system should work satisfactorily during the first twelve-month period;

b. that the production of fissile materials for military purposes should also cease, and that within the second' twelve-month period progress be made in the setting up of an inspection system judged satisfactory by each party.

11. The gap between the two theses is narrowing insofar as it concerns the necessity of a control system for the suspension of test explosions, accepted by the U. S. S. R. on 14th June 1957, and the suspension period, the duration of which, as originally suggested by the Soviets, should be two years. The same does not apply to the relationship between the cessation of tests and the cessation of the production of fissile materials for military purposes, which is demanded by the Western Powers but refused by the U. S. S. R. However important the suspension of tests may be to the health of mankind, such a measure alone would not put an end to the armaments race. The Powers that have already carried out tests would still be in a position, thanks to the results obtained, to continue developing their weapons, increasing their stockpiles, and even supplying these to their allies. The U. S. S. R. might catch up with the United States in stockpiling, while America would be compelled to stop work on the development of new types of nuclear weapons which would have otherwise

resulted from further test explosions. The gap would widen between producing States and States not yet having started production or carried out tests. This is a particularly serious problem for States of the second category, amongst which is France.

12. If the nuclear Powers agree to cease production of nuclear weapons, France has declared herself ready to stop work in connection with the production of her nuclear bomb. Otherwise, France expects to be in possession of it within two years, according to a statement made by M. Jules Moch. Other countries would reach the same stage of development within the next four years.

13. Although the nuclear Powers of our time admit the danger of seeing their number increase to the point where an agreement on nuclear disarmament would become practically impossible, the Sub-committee ended its Session in London without achieving any result in this respect. The important concessions granted by the Western Powers have been in vain—acceptance of the twenty-four-month period; the postponement of the cessation of the production of fissile materials for military purposes to the end of the second twelvemonth period; the setting-up of a system of control of this cessation, but not before the second period. The Western Powers went a long way—and were entitled to expect concessions in return by the Soviet Union.

14. The Committee has therefore tabled an entirely new text for Section II.