

CONSEIL DE L'ATLANTIQUE NORD
NORTH ATLANTIC COUNCIL

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COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION AND CULTURAL RELATIONS

NORTH ATLANTIC FESTIVAL

Note by the Director of Information

At its meeting on 10th January, 1956,⁺ the Committee invited the Secretariat to study the question of a North Atlantic Festival more fully and to prepare a detailed paper on the subject. This has now been done and the Information Division, when the Committee met on 14th February, was thus able to make a verbal statement the gist of which, with certain additions, is given in this memorandum.

2. First, the Committee's attention must be drawn to a new and important development which occurred in February. It is of a kind calculated greatly to facilitate implementation of the project since it would considerably reduce the outlay. The French Foreign Ministry, which supports the project and is anxious for it to be carried out, having contacted the Ministry of National Defence, the latter has just announced that it is ready to back a North Atlantic Festival, to the full, and has moreover stated that its backing will in all probability, take the following practical form:

- (a) provision of accommodation and board for foreign contingents taking part in the Festival: for about 500 to 600 men;
- (b) placing at the disposal of NATO of the "Nuits de l'Armée" technicians for organizing and putting the finishing touches to the display.

3. This offer, which allays the concern expressed by several delegations, will naturally greatly lighten the financial burden which would otherwise have to be borne by the countries taking part in this Festival, since expenditure would be reduced to the travelling expenses of their contingents.

4. While these negotiations were proceeding with the Ministry of National Defence, the Information Division again contacted the "Nuits de l'Armée" technicians with the following result.

5. Date of Festival - In view of the time needed to organize the Festival, assuming that the Committee approves the principle of the project without delay, the Festival could be held at the end of October or beginning of November, 1956.

+ AC/52-R/45, Item IV.

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6. Programme - The Festival programme should include about 12 to 14 items, more than one of which could, if necessary, be put on by contingents belonging to a single member country. Participation by all the countries is therefore not essential.

If possible, there should be several military bands.

The following well-known displays illustrate the kind of entertainment which, according to the technicians, would certainly be popular:

- (a) the Naval Field Gun competition by the Royal Navy Schools;
- (b) a march-past by a Scottish unit to the music of the pipers;
- (c) a demonstration by the Belgian Gendarmerie's trained police dogs;
- (d) Changing of the Guard by the Royal Canadian North-West Mounted Police (the "Mounties") even with numbers reduced, for instance, to 24 horsemen; the horses might be lent by the Garde Républicaine. According to Mr. Castans, this display would be very popular.
- (e) A demonstration of an "assault course" similar to the one given for the "Nuits de l'Armée" which, in this case, might take the form of a competition between teams of different nationalities.

These are merely suggestions intended to show that, in the opinion of the technicians, it is not necessary to use a large number of men or to obtain the assistance of units from all member countries. Not more than 500 to 600 participants, including officers, would be required.

7. Interest of project - Explanations of why a show such as the North Atlantic Festival would serve NATO interests are given in documents AC/52-D/131 and AC/52-D/143. It is merely necessary to point out again in the present note that the "Nuits de l'Armée" have become increasingly popular and financially successful over the last three years. For instance, the net profits from the "Nuits de l'Armée" were Frs. 1,000,000 in 1952, Frs. 5,000,000 in 1953, Frs. 30,000,000 in 1954 and Frs. 15,000,000 in 1955. The fall in profits last year is due to the fact that the display at Lyons had to be cancelled at the last moment. The proceeds shown above went to an Army charity. Public opinion is obviously in favour of this use of the money since this makes the display an occasion for unselfish and generous support.

It should not be forgotten, however, that the success of the North Atlantic Festival depends primarily on its being a show and a good one at that; only the quality of the display will attract a wide public, though it is obvious that the programme and, even more the spoken commentary, will easily enable the desired aim of influencing public opinion in favour of NATO, to be easily achieved.

The following is an instance of the publicity value of the project. The North Atlantic Festival project having recently been mentioned in London when the Information Division contacted

the BBC Television Service, the latter stated that it would certainly be prepared to see that the programme was retransmitted over the Eurovision network (United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands). The BBC authorities explained that a display such as the North Atlantic Festival was exactly the type of feature they were seeking for inclusion in the programmes to be shown on Eurovision.

It should be pointed out that the scope of all the above considerations is general and that they are therefore applicable to North Atlantic Festivals organized in towns other than Paris, whether capital cities or not.

8. Organization - The "Nuits de l'Armée Française" have been successful precisely because the display has good show value and this, in turn, is due to the way in which it is handled.

Responsibility for the "Nuits de l'Armée" is vested in an Organizing Committee consisting of:

- a qualified representative of the Ministry of National Defence;
- the manager of the "Vélodrome d'Hiver";
- a competent producer;
- two representatives of "Paris-Match".

The same members have served on this Committee for four years and have therefore acquired considerable experience of this type of display, and of the conditions needed for success. Should the Committee decide to hold the North Atlantic Festival, it would be highly desirable to set up immediately a special committee competent to discuss the problems involved.

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