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COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION AND CULTURAL RELATIONS

NATO TOURS OF JOURNALISTS

Memorandum by the Netherlands Delegation

Convinced of the value of journalistic tours and in an effort to contribute to the elimination of certain weak points in their organization, the Netherlands Delegation submits to the Committee on Information and Cultural Relations the following observations which are based on the experience of the authorities in The Hague with tours visiting the Netherlands.

2. Aim of the tours. Document AC/24-D/36 (Revised) describes the purpose as "... the development of better public understanding of the aims and work of NATO". It is felt that if taken literally this definition restricts the possibilities of arranging worthwhile national programmes for the tours. It is therefore suggested to add to this definition: "and of the NATO peoples and countries", thus leaving national authorities a wider scope for arranging detailed programmes.

3. Special Themes. The practice to choose a special theme for each tour has not been a success in the Netherlands. It was noted that on the two occasions when a theme was adopted, practically none of the members of the group were experts on the chosen subject; as a result it was sometimes very difficult to keep the group interested in the programme. It is suggested that the system of special-theme tours be followed only if the expert knowledge of the participants is guaranteed beforehand.

4. Standing of participants. The aim of the tours can only be attained if the members of the tours are of a high standing. It appears to be increasingly difficult to find highly qualified journalists. There seems to be no objection, however, to inviting the same man for a second tour, provided he does not visit the same country twice. Another way of meeting this difficulty might be to widen the field of possible participants by inviting more radio and television reporters than has been done up till now.

5. Advance briefing of tour-members. It would seem that participants would greatly benefit by being provided in advance with some background documentation on the countries they are going to visit. It is therefore suggested that, as a rule, the invited journalists are contacted in their country of residence by the diplomatic or press representatives of the countries to be visited. This will work only if the names and addresses of tour-members are known well in advance.

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6. Administrative arrangements. In the past the authorities in The Hague have been severely handicapped by the fact that the number and names of the tour-members were available at the last minute only, thus causing them serious difficulties in obtaining the necessary security clearances to visit factories. Moreover, when the Netherlands authorities on one occasion offered participants the choice of four alternative programmes - an experiment which proved to be very successful - the lack of names and therefore the impossibility to establish advance contacts with them, had as a result that a great many details could only be settled after arrival of the group. It is therefore considered essential that all concerned fully co-operate to ensure that the personal data of the participants be known well in advance. This also implies that national information services should submit their tentative programmes to the NATO Information Division as early as possible in order that the latter can ensure the necessary co-ordination of national programmes and inform the members of the tour and national information services some weeks in advance. To avoid misunderstandings delegations should receive copies of all direct correspondence between the Information Division and the national information services concerned.

7. Finally, the smooth organization and therefore the success of the tours, depends upon the full co-operation by the journalists selected. In this respect the part to be played by the Escort Officers is highly important.

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