

'The Brussels Treaty' from Le Monde (17 March 1948)

Caption: On 17 March 1948, the day of the signing of the Brussels Treaty by France, the United Kingdom, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, the French daily newspaper Le Monde summarises for its readers the substance of the agreement.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. Beuve-Méry, Hubert. 17.03.1948. Paris: Le Monde. "Le traité de Bruxelles", p. 1.

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The Brussels Treaty

The Treaty that is to be signed this afternoon in Brussels between Great Britain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg is primarily a treaty of mutual assistance. It also includes economic, social and cultural clauses that allow it to be described as a genuine Western treaty. The union that it establishes between five nations must extend to all areas; it represents a core area which might be extended so as to incorporate an ever greater portion of our continent.

Following a preamble, in which concern about preventing any renewal, by Germany, of its policy of aggression as well as the wish of the contracting parties to cooperate loyally and to coordinate their efforts to develop Western European prosperity are set out, Article 1 is dedicated to the improvement of the economic situation. The signatories undertake to promote such improvement, to abstain from any policy which might provoke conflict between their respective economies, and to organise and harmonise their production systems.

Other clauses stipulate that they will make every effort to raise the standard of living of the peoples concerned, to develop social institutions, and to enhance cultural relations between the various nations.

The subsequent articles lay down the specific conditions for the assistance that the five nations will have to provide each other in the event of an act of aggression. It complies with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, which recognises ‘the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security.’

Such assistance is automatic if the act of aggression takes place in Europe, and it is preceded by consultation if it occurs on another continent. As was the case in the Treaty of Dunkirk, Germany is named as a possible aggressor, but, contrary to what is specified in that treaty, it is not the only potential aggressor; it is well known that, today, others might also be classed as such.

One of the treaty’s characteristics is that it lays down provisions for the maintenance of contact between the participants. The Consultative Council, made up of the five Ministers for Foreign Affairs, will meet periodically. It will be backed up by a permanent body, which will most likely have its headquarters in London or Paris. The effectiveness of the treaty will depend essentially on the role that will be assigned to the Consultative Council, on the activities that it will undertake, and on the number and the importance of the issues submitted to it. It is through the Consultative Council that cooperation between the five powers might become real, that not just economic problems but also political and security issues might be tackled; military technical agreements are not included in the treaty.

The final articles establish the duration of the treaty — 50 years — and the arbitration procedure, should there be disagreement over its interpretation. Litigation will be referred to the International Court in The Hague. Finally, the accession of other countries is planned, and that will require a unanimous vote by current participants.

This extension of the treaty is a natural progression. It will come about one of these days. However, it would not be seemly to rush into things. It is clear that some of the signatories to the Brussels Treaty would not be in favour of any imminent accession that might already be desired by one or the other country.

If the treaty signed today is not a simple diplomatic document but the point of departure for a Western European organisation, then this organisation will be subject not only to decisions that might be taken between the five signatories but also to the work that will be achieved outside it, notably the application of the Marshall Plan and the joint action of the Sixteen. Above all, it is subject to the practical action of the United Kingdom and France and to their determination to unite Europe.