

'Eurocorps goes operational' from Le Monde (1 December 1995)

Caption: On 1 December 1995, the French daily newspaper Le Monde describes the establishment and the tasks of Eurocorps, the first component of a European defence pillar comprising Belgian, French, German, Luxembourg and Spanish troops.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. COLOMBANI, Jean-Marie. 01.12.1995, n° 15.815; 51e année. Paris: Le Monde. "L'Eurocorps est devenu opérationnel", auteur:Isnard, Jacques , p. 5.

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Eurocorps goes operational

A 50 000-strong force capable of serving WEU and NATO

The Defence Ministers of the five countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg and Spain) which created Eurocorps were due, on Thursday 30 November, to attend a ceremony at the Laon-Couvron (Aisne, France) military base which would formally mark the acquisition of operational capability by this 50 000-strong, European army corps commanded by General Helmut Willmann of Germany. The ceremony comes at the end of *Pegasus-95*, an exercise lasting the whole of the second half of November in which some 10 000 troops were mobilised in Belgium, Luxembourg and France to train the various levels of command. As from January 1996, a French general will assume command of Eurocorps.

In all, it will have taken three and a half years to establish Eurocorps, a military creation which the German Chancellor, in a revealing slip of the tongue at a Franco-German meeting, referred to as a 'European army', thinking, no doubt, of the defunct European Defence Community (EDC), which left behind it so many mixed memories on its demise in 1953, during the Fourth Republic.

Eurocorps, set up in May 1992 at the La Rochelle Summit in a joint initiative by François Mitterrand and Chancellor Kohl, was initially a purely Franco-German venture. The founders were, however, joined in 1993 by Belgium and, in 1994, by Luxembourg and Spain. It consists essentially of the French 1st Division (stationed in Germany, with some units in France), the German 10th Armoured Division, the Belgian 1st Mechanised Division and the Spanish 21st Brigade. The command function is supplied by a 350-strong permanent joint Staff based in Strasbourg.

Series of exercises

A particular feature of Eurocorps is its freedom to intervene either as part of Western European Union (WEU) or of NATO. The two treaties on which these collective security organisations are based include a virtually identical provision at Article 5, namely an obligation on the member countries to assist any State which is the victim of external aggression. In addition to the conditions under which the common defence provisions in Article 5 of the Treaty of Brussels (WEU) and of the Treaty of Washington (NATO) may be invoked, Eurocorps may be mobilised for humanitarian missions, to evacuate nationals, in support of peacekeeping or peacemaking operations under the aegis of the United Nations or the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

More specifically, the arrangements for committing Eurocorps under WEU political control were laid down in an agreement concluded on 24 September 1993. According to that agreement, military action would be conducted with the WEU Council and its Operational Planning Cell, which would designate a theatre commander as required. Specifically again, commitment under NATO authority was regulated by an agreement, dated 21 January 1993, with the Supreme Allied Command Europe: in this eventuality, the European corps would be placed under the authority of NATO Headquarters in accordance with plans approved on a case-by-case basis by the Staffs of the armed forces making up Eurocorps, with the proviso that the formations concerned would be relieved of their commitment in the event of a refusal by a single member country.

During 1994 and 1995, a series of battlefield map or limited field exercises were designed to develop and hone Eurocorps' future operational procedures. The last such milestone was passed with the *Pegasus-95* exercise, which recently came to an end at the Laon-Couvron base. The exercise was notified to Vienna in connection with the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, thereby enabling it to be monitored by Austrian and Polish observers.

Without denying the practical difficulties, the five governments are concerned to demonstrate that Eurocorps is capable of acting both as an instrument of a common European external and security policy and as a reinforcement of the Atlantic Alliance, in the form of a European defence 'pillar'. A worthy enough ambition, yet one that has already been severely tested by the war in Bosnia, in which, for example, the

French argued for a Eurocorps contribution to the NATO-controlled international peace force, while the Germans limited any Bundeswehr involvement to logistical operations.

Two further obstacles are apparent. Firstly, dual control over Eurocorps may lead to uncertainty as to how it may, in practice, be deployed. And, secondly, extending a military structure of this kind to participants other than the founder countries does not seem to be an option, for reasons to do with the corps' operational efficiency.

This is probably why strictly European military cooperation is becoming increasingly common within NATO, prompted by a concern, on the one hand, not to stray from the Atlantic Alliance and, on the other hand, to build bilateral or multilateral, 'neighbourhood' relations. Current examples include a German-Danish and a German-Dutch corps, an Anglo-Dutch amphibious corps and the multinational *Allied Rapid Reaction Force* (ARRF) which combines Belgian, British, German and Dutch units and whose General Staff should provide a basis for the international peace force in Bosnia.

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