

## 'Europe and its security' from Le Soir (28 October 1987)

**Caption:** On 28 October 1987, the Belgian daily newspaper Le Soir considers the scope of the 'Platform on European Security Interests' text, adopted the previous day in The Hague by the Foreign and Defence Ministers of Western European Union (WEU). The article emphasises the benefits of this initiative, taken with the aim of reviving the organisation and defining a European defence identity.

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## Europe and its security

A little progress has recently been made in the shaping of the European pillar of the Alliance. The step, the very epitome of timorousness, that the Ministers of Western European Union have just taken in The Hague takes them as far as the talking stage: they adopted not a charter, as Jacques Chirac proposed almost a year ago now, but a simple 'platform'. However, by adopting a text setting out a common defence policy, almost 30 years after the failure of the European Defence Community and three years after the announcement that WEU was to be revived, the seven Member States of this union have begun to forge an identity for Europe's security.

The outcome of an increasingly widespread desire to create a political Europe, this development is also, perhaps first and foremost, the result of external pressures: firstly the impact of the Reykjavik Summit, where Europeans saw the foundations of the doctrine on which security in the Atlantic Alliance and Europe was based — flexible response and nuclear deterrence — rejected point-blank by the US President; and secondly the US's growing desire, in the face of remarkable budgetary pressure, for fairer financial contributions to the common defence effort.

### Political support

The development may be seen at various levels, one of which is international cooperation, particularly within the only institutional frameworks currently equal to the task: namely, in NATO itself or through the more independent WEU. Another indication of a change in approach is to be found in the way Ministers from seven European countries are seeking to coordinate their military involvement outside their territory, in the Gulf. With caution. Their American partners must not be offended, while those in the United States who recommend pulling out of the Old Continent must not be provided with pretexts and arguments. Between dependence and autonomy, the pursuit of an independent identity is all the more difficult because each step towards emancipation is marked by its impact on the budget.

Nevertheless, this development is receiving growing political support. As if seeking to encourage the Ministers convening in The Hague, a very large majority of the European Parliament has just declared itself in favour of a political platform on European Defence which would, among other things, put Europe on an equal footing with the United States in NATO, aim for a balance of forces between East and West and seek to rise above rivalry between blocs and the division of the Continent.

However, it is particularly in the context of bilateral relations that the future canvas of European Defence will be woven, France being its main craftsman. This includes attempts to pool national nuclear forces with the United Kingdom with a view to one day creating a strictly European deterrent force; military agreements with Italy and Spain to strengthen the Mediterranean flank; and assiduous cooperation with the Federal Republic of Germany (Operation 'Bold Sparrow' and joint brigade and defence council projects) to deal with the East. The most striking fact about this desire to cooperate is no doubt France's apparent undertaking to reappraise its own security doctrine, opening up to the notion of extending its nuclear protection to German territory — this was the main focus of François Mitterrand's recent visit to the Federal Republic of Germany.

On the more practical level of industrial cooperation on defence, improvements still seem few and far between, and the failures outnumber the successes. Concern to increase harmonisation of military programmes is nevertheless gaining ground.

### And some misgivings

That said, several political constraints have been added to the technical, economic and institutional handicaps slowing down European emancipation as regards security, which presage many more doubts to come. As well as the strict limits within which the United States and NATO will allow Europe to find its defence identity, the misgivings of European countries themselves, particularly over the overbearing French leadership, are leading to inertia. The other great European nations frown upon the fact that Paris, admittedly

the only strictly autonomous European nuclear power but, at the same time, hardly an exemplary member of the Atlantic Alliance, claims a disproportionately large role for itself.

The imperatives of home affairs may lead to other difficulties. They are at the root of Italian reservations about the scope of the document signed in The Hague, owing to Giulio Andreotti's aspirations to become President. In turn, French resolve could suffer as a result of the political cohabitation. Even if François Mitterrand and André Giraud, President of the Republic and Defence Minister respectively, both seem to back the idea of a full opening-up of the national sanctuary, they do not seem to share the same ideas on the future of the French pre-strategic forces.

Should not other countries wishing to join WEU — Greece, Portugal and Spain (EEC Member States), and Norway and Turkey (NATO member countries) finally be allowed to accede? 'To do so,' Leo Tindemans points out, 'these countries will have to accept the platform as it was defined last Tuesday at The Hague.' But some of them are against the nuclear weapons whose role has recently been reaffirmed.

In its pursuit of an identity, Europe will have trouble keeping pace with Washington and Moscow as they call into question both their relations and strategies.

Pierre Lefèvre