

'Europe's military wing builds up its strength' from Le Soir (20 June 1992)

Caption: On 20 June 1992, the Belgian daily newspaper Le Soir considers the measures adopted the previous day in Petersberg by the Foreign and Defence Ministers of the Member States of Western European Union (WEU). The article emphasises the operational role assigned to the organisation which, as the military arm of the European Union and European pillar of the Atlantic Alliance, is now responsible for leading crisis-management and peacekeeping missions.

Source: Le Soir. 20-21.06.1992, n° 143; 106e année. Bruxelles. "Le bras armé de l'Europe se muscle", auteur:Lefèvre, Pierre , p. 8.

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Yet another warning for Yugoslavia

Europe's military wing builds up its strength

Western European Union, heartened by the results of the referendum in Ireland, took a first step towards military power in Bonn yesterday

Bonn

From our special correspondent

Mandated by the Maastricht Treaty to become both the military wing of the Europe of the Twelve and the European pillar within NATO, WEU, the European defence organisation, has established a Planning Cell responsible for drawing up plans for the deployment of the forces in its charge as well as for making recommendations and giving instructions to their military headquarters.

The Foreign and Defence Ministers of the nine Member States have also given WEU a truly operational role by assigning to it a series of new tasks. Like NATO, they have also offered the organisation's services to the UN and to the CSCE for the conduct of potential peacekeeping missions. They went even further than the Atlantic Organisation — a certain rivalry continues to pit these two organisations against each other. The military units of the Member States, acting under WEU auspices, will, in future, be deployed not only for humanitarian tasks or the evacuation of nationals and for peacekeeping tasks but also for 'tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peacemaking'.

The nine Member States have all committed themselves to making units from the entire spectrum of their conventional armed forces available to WEU (there is, at present, no question of adding a nuclear dimension to European security outside NATO). Similarly, the French and the Germans have confirmed that the new common army corps that they have recently created would be made available to WEU as well as to NATO.

The Belgians will certainly take part in WEU's activities, notably through a multinational airborne division, but no decision has yet been taken, according to Willy Claes and Leo Delcroix, Belgian Foreign and Defence Ministers. Likewise, the Belgian Ministers were not able to confirm any decision to join the Franco-German corps. Negotiations are under way, but a decision is not due until June, a little later than expected. According to Mr Delcroix, there are still some ambiguities to be cleared up between the Germans and the French themselves on the extent of WEU's authority over this corps.

Blockade of Yugoslavia?

For its part, WEU also wanted to fire a warning shot in the direction of the belligerent Yugoslavs. In a special statement, Ministers deplored the hopeless humanitarian situation and the constant recourse to violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Most importantly, they have declared themselves ready to help enforce United Nations' resolutions regarding this conflict and have instructed an ad hoc group to study WEU's potential in this respect. Some would have liked to see a clearer reference to the possibility of involvement in a naval blockade of Yugoslavia in the event of a new UN resolution, but others, including the British and the Belgian Minister Willy Claes, who presently holds the rotating presidency of the Security Council, have urged caution. 'We must not provide some members of the Security Council, who have the right of veto, with arguments, nor overturn the existing order,' Willy Claes explained to the journalists. 'It is primarily for the UN to evaluate the situation and to act, and only then is it for WEU to consider how it might intervene.'

Moreover, the Nine have drawn up their own enlargement plans. They have offered the other Member States of the European Union the chance to join WEU. Only Greece is to join in the near future. Denmark and Ireland, who are in less of a hurry, will be granted observer status. Likewise, WEU has offered associate status, a very attractive proposal, to European states which do not belong to the Twelve but do belong to NATO: Iceland, Norway and Turkey.

Towards Central Europe

Finally, in the afternoon, WEU Ministers met representatives from eight countries of Central and Eastern Europe (the three Visegrad countries, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland; Romania; Bulgaria and the three Baltic States) in order to open the process for specific cooperation with them on security issues. The aim is to forge closer links with these countries than would be possible in the 37-strong North Atlantic Cooperation Council, links geared to these countries' levels of rapprochement with the Community. Among other forms of cooperation, the eight Eastern partners, chosen moreover on the basis of the Association Agreements or Cooperation Agreements that they have already concluded with the EEC, will be invited to attend an annual ministerial meeting with WEU. The Nine will also gradually establish a dialogue with the Maghreb countries.

Pierre Lefèvre