

'Spain and WEU: the other Presidency' from El País (31 October 1995)

Caption: With Spain holding the Presidency of the Council of Western European Union (WEU) in the second semester of 1995, at the same time as it holds that of the Council of the European Union (EU), Javier Solana, Spanish Foreign Minister from 1992 to 1995, outlines in this article, published on 31 October 1995 in the daily newspaper El País, his country's priorities concerning WEU's role as the defence component of the EU.

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Spain and WEU: the other Presidency

A common defence for Europe

JAVIER SOLANA

The author notes that Spain holds the Presidency of Western European Union for this half of the year and trusts that, by the end of that period, Europe will be closer to making a common defence a reality.

The beginning of the Spanish Presidency of the European Union has, naturally, been widely discussed in the media in our country. That was not the case for the other Presidency assumed by Spain on the same day: the Presidency of Western European Union (WEU). Nevertheless, that Presidency is a matter of great importance. Indeed, WEU is the only European organisation which has competence in defence matters and the only forum in which the Ministers for Defence and Foreign Affairs meet regularly to formulate a common defence policy and decide on joint use of military resources.

Furthermore, it is also the first time that our country has taken on this responsibility since it became part of the organisation in 1990. Even more importantly, it is the first time that a single State has held the Presidency of the Council of the European Union and the Presidency of WEU simultaneously.

The importance of the task entrusted to Spain is, nevertheless, shaped by other, more profound reasons. Our country has assumed the Presidency of WEU at a particularly important time in the history of the organisation. Since the Maastricht Treaty, which made it the defence component of the European Union and the means of strengthening the European pillar of the Atlantic Alliance, WEU has been immersed in a process of developing its military resources (known in the trade as ‘operational capabilities’) to enable it to perform that dual role effectively.

This operational development of WEU, which is still fairly new, is being carried out in such a way as to complement the assets of the Atlantic Alliance which, in turn, may also be used in certain circumstances for European operations. Thus, duplication of effort is prevented, and cooperation is fostered between WEU and NATO, which is also being overhauled.

In fact, WEU has already carried out a number of operations of a military or paramilitary nature. I refer, for example, to the surveillance operation in the Adriatic and on the Danube as part of the regime of sanctions and embargo against Serbia-Montenegro, or the cooperation of one year’s standing between WEU and the Administration set up by the EU in the city of Mostar. Spain is involved in the three operations: two units from our Navy are in the Adriatic, and Civil Guard units are active on the Danube and in Mostar.

To that end, Spain, as President of WEU, has the duty to ensure during this six-month period that the organisation is able to perform its role as part of the defence of the European Union in an increasingly flexible and effective way. Accordingly, the Spanish Presidency is working to place measures already adopted by the organisation under the previous Presidency on a tangible footing: for example, the establishment of a crisis centre and a military intelligence section in Brussels, the continuation of studies aiming to provide WEU with a satellite surveillance system and the conduct of crisis exercises to assess how well the politico-military decision-making mechanisms work.

The activities of the Spanish Presidency must, nevertheless, be concentrated at the political level.

As agreed in Maastricht, the provisions which currently govern security and defence matters are to be reviewed in 1996; in practice, those provisions entrust security to the EU and defence to WEU, which is thereby enshrined as an autonomous organisation of the Union. That review has been in preparation during the second half of this year, and its results will be the basis for the decisions which the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference will take in that regard.

The main objective of this review is to be able to make progress, as agreed in Maastricht, in the construction of

a genuine European Security and Defence Identity. The reality of conflicts such as those in the former Yugoslavia could not illustrate more clearly the need to pool the various crisis-management resources available in our countries, whether political, economic, humanitarian or military in nature.

Spain has drawn up and already submitted to its partners a document proposing new measures to strengthen the operational capabilities of WEU as well as a wide range of options for developing the institutional link between that organisation and the European Union in the future. Those options range from the Union taking on the role of European defence, with WEU being integrated into it as a result, to keeping WEU as an autonomous body, with various intermediate formulae of gradual but increasingly greater convergence in between.

What Spain would like, regardless of which option is selected, is for the review to bring about stronger ties between the European Union and WEU in the overall framework of European integration, which remains unfinished while it has no defence dimension.

Another priority objective of the Spanish Presidency is to bring to an end the 'Common Reflection on the New European Security Conditions' begun by WEU during the first half of the year and which, when the time is right, could take the form of a White Paper on European Security. The value of such a study lies essentially in the wide range of countries involved because, in addition to countries which are full members, countries which have WEU Observer or Associate Status are also taking part (in short, all the European States which are members of NATO and the nine Central European countries, including the Baltic States). This is of particular importance in connection with the processes of expansion of those organisations. Furthermore, the conclusions of that study are to act as a basis for implementing the security policy set out in the Maastricht Treaty.

Finally, the Spanish Presidency of WEU is working to maintain and strengthen relations between WEU and those third countries of particular importance for European security, whether because they are entities in their own right, such as the Russian Federation and Ukraine, or whether because they are part of an area, for example the southern shores of the Mediterranean, which is of crucial importance to our own security.

The programme that Spain has been painstakingly preparing and which it is making every effort to implement is, therefore, an ambitious one. I trust that, at the end of our Presidency, Europe will be a little bit closer to attaining the objective that we set ourselves some time ago, namely to make a Common European Defence a reality.

Javier Solana is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Spain.

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