

‘European defence: the Big Four’s plan’ from Le Soir (2 December 1999)

Caption: On 2 December 1999, in advance of the Helsinki European Council, the Belgian daily newspaper, Le Soir reveals the substance of a document drawn up by the four largest countries of the European Union (France, the United Kingdom, Germany and Italy) which determines the four bodies which should enable the European Union to take decisions in the fields of security and defence and to conduct its own military operations: the General Affairs Council, the Political and Security Committee, the EU Military Committee and the EU Military Staff.

Source: Le Soir. 02.12.1999. Bruxelles: Rossel. "Défense européenne: le plan des quatre grands", auteur:Lefèvre, Pierre , p. 7.

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Exclusive: substance of the reference document for Helsinki Summit

European defence: the Big Four's plan

What bodies will the European Union set up in order to pursue its future common defence and security policy? The EU's Big Four — France, the UK, Germany and Italy — have sent the Finnish Presidency a joint document which should greatly influence, if not determine, the decisions taken at the forthcoming Helsinki Summit.

We have been appraised of the substance of the document. Its existence was revealed by the French President and the German Chancellor at their meeting in Paris on Tuesday, although the paper itself remains confidential. It reveals the measure of the four countries' ambitions: inter alia, they would like to equip the Union with its own military headquarters with 60 to 90 officers, i.e. considerably more than the 50 or so currently available to Western European Union but nothing comparable to SHAPE, NATO's European headquarters.

The document, entitled *Military bodies, planning and conduct of EU-led operations*, basically defines the four elements that would enable the Union to take decisions on security and defence and to conduct military operations on its own behalf.

At the top ministerial level, the document does not envisage the establishment of a Council of Defence Ministers as such. Decisions would continue to be taken by the General Affairs Council (Foreign Ministers), but Defence Ministers would be included, where necessary. The document explains that Defence Ministers will be able to play their part and advise on specific defence issues, without the need for new institutional arrangements.

The Union is known to envisage the creation of a Political and Security Committee (PSC) consisting of permanent delegates from the 15 Member States.

The Big Four's document goes furthest at the strictly military level, recommending the creation of a *European Union Military Committee* and a *European Union Military Staff Headquarters*, along the lines of the NATO institutions.

The Military Committee, also a permanent body, would be composed of the Chiefs of Staff of the 15 countries and would be run on a day-to-day basis by national military delegates.

The Committee's basic task would be to make recommendations to the Union's political authorities and give strategic direction to the European Military Staff Headquarters. Its Chairman would attend meetings of the Political and Security Committee and NATO's Military Committee, while the Deputy SACEUR (European deputy of the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe) would also attend meetings of the European Union Military Committee.

All sources

The European Military Staff Headquarters would carry out all the normal tasks of a body of that kind. They are defined in detail for three scenarios: in peacetime, during a crisis and in the course of EU military operations. The Military Staff Headquarters should have access to all available intelligence sources: the WEU Satellite Centre, the intelligence services of the Member States and NATO. It should be capable of carrying out the main Petersberg Tasks (humanitarian, peacekeeping and peacemaking tasks) and have the necessary means to expand in periods of crisis so as to operate round the clock. On present estimates, which may have to be revised, the document envisages a staff of 60 to 90 officers.

The document is at pains to define the interface between these bodies and NATO, especially as the latter would be called upon in most cases to provide the Europeans with military resources. But the Union intends to be capable of conducting its own operations without endorsement by other allies. In this respect, the

document recommends close coordination with NATO, especially in prior consultations, planning and the conduct of operations. But it makes it clear that, although the Deputy SACEUR and SHAPE would be the operational commanders and strategic HQ for operations that use NATO resources, they would not be the only candidates.

The question of the degree of EU autonomy vis-à-vis NATO is one of the trickiest issues in discussions between the Union and the United States and among the Europeans themselves. It has still to be settled.

Pierre Lefèvre