

'Europe seeking to establish its own regional intervention force' from Le Monde (16 November 1999)

Caption: On 15 November 1999, the Council of the European Union convenes, for the first time, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs and for Defence. In an article dated 16 November 1999, the French daily newspaper Le Monde reveals the determination of these Ministers to equip the Union with an intervention force capable of responding to regional crisis situations.

Source: Le Monde. 16 novembre 1999. Paris. "L'Europe veut se doter d'une capacité d'intervention dans des crises régionales", auteur:Vernet, Daniel , p. 3.

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Europe seeking to establish its own regional intervention force

The Ministers of Defence and Foreign Affairs of the Fifteen are meeting in Brussels to decide on common 'indicators' for a military projection capability

The Defence Ministers of the Fifteen are meeting in Brussels, together with their Foreign Affairs colleagues, on Monday 15 November, for the first time since the beginning of the European integration process, in order to give impetus to the plans for a common security policy. Following the Franco-British declaration in Saint Malo a year ago, the Franco-German Summit in Toulouse in May, and the Cologne European Council in June, this meeting in Brussels marks a new step forwards before the Helsinki European Council, which will set the timetable for establishing an EU regional intervention capability.

The Brussels meeting should see movement on three fronts: strengthening the role of the High Representative for a Common Foreign and Security Policy ('Mr CFSP'), establishing the institutional framework for defence policy and defining Europe's military capabilities.

The Foreign Ministers of the Fifteen are likely to accept that 'Mr CFSP' —Javier Solana — should also next week be appointed Secretary-General of Western European Union (WEU), which has hitherto been the only European organisation with responsibility for defence matters but is soon to merge with the EU. Acceptance will be subject to two reservations: to overcome the reluctance of WEU member countries that do not belong to the EU, there is likely to be a statement that combination of the two offices will not necessarily be permanent; and to allay the fears of EU Member States that do not belong to NATO, the two hats (CFSP and WEU) will be worn together only for 'Petersberg Tasks' (crisis management) and not in the case of action taken under Article 5 of the WEU Treaty, which creates automatic solidarity among its members in the event of an external threat to any one of them. The traditionally neutral countries do not want the EU to be seen as a military alliance.

The dual function will enable Mr Solana to attend the NATO meeting in December as Secretary-General of WEU without prior settlement of relations between the EU and the Atlantic Alliance.

Specific proposals

On the institutional front, France submitted specific proposals in July regarding the membership and functioning of the Political and Security Committee (PSC) referred to in the conclusions of the Cologne European Council. In a letter to his EU colleagues, Jacques Chirac suggested that the PSC be chaired by 'Mr CFSP' and consist of permanent representatives of the Fifteen with the rank of ambassador, along the lines of the NATO Council. These suggestions have met with objections from some of his partners: if the PSC were chaired by 'Mr CFSP', would that not undermine the role of the President of the Council of Ministers? Should not the member countries' permanent representatives to the European Communities also sit on the Political and Security Committee? Can a new committee be set up without an amendment of the Treaties?

To avoid getting bogged down in institutional issues, however, the meeting of Foreign and Defence Ministers is likely to focus on the military resources available to Europe. To quote Lord Robertson, who made his contribution to European defence policy as British Defence Minister before becoming Secretary-General of NATO: 'You can't send an establishment plan, however beautiful, to a region in crisis.'

The French Ministers come to Brussels with fairly clear ideas about what should be done regarding military resources. With respect to what the specialists call 'military decision-making instruments', France proposes that, in addition to the Political and Security Committee, a European Military Committee be established, composed of representatives of the 15 Chiefs-of-Staff, as well as a European Military Staff Headquarters and a planning cell with sufficient resources to synthesise intelligence, analyse situations and propose operational scenarios.

In terms of resources in the strict sense of the word, France wants the EU to equip itself with the means to

assess situations, plan and conduct operations, project forces, fight battles, sustain long-term operations, maintain a high level of training and ensure efficient interoperability of armed forces.

In the French view, Europe should be capable of undertaking the most demanding of the tasks envisaged in the Petersberg agreements. In 1992, at Petersberg Castle near Bonn, WEU members agreed to carry out humanitarian, peacekeeping and peacemaking operations. In 1997, the Petersberg Tasks were incorporated into the Treaty of Amsterdam. In the short term, Europe must acquire the means to deploy a ground force the size of an army corps (50 000 to 60 000 men), roughly equivalent to KFOR in Kosovo.

In the longer term, Europe should increase its projection forces and their command facilities by coordinating national joint staffs and restructuring existing European military staffs like Eurocorps. France is not in favour of defining in advance European intervention scenarios that could subsequently prove restrictive or objectives that are too precise and would appear to place a limit on the EU's ambitions in the field of common defence. In order to rationalise and increase Europe's military capabilities, it had been proposed that 'convergence criteria' (in particular, budgetary criteria) be adopted for defence, along the lines of the criteria for the single currency. The term 'criteria' has been dropped in favour of 'convergence indicators', partly in order to avoid embarrassing countries that have to contribute to European defence while making cuts in their own defence expenditure. Such indicators could be ratios measuring levels of troop training, projection capability or equipment.

Daniel Vernet

No British troops in a European army

In a statement on Sunday 14 November, Britain's Defence Minister, Geoff Hoon, ruled out any possibility of United Kingdom troops' forming part of a future 'European army' distinct from NATO. He denied the *Sunday Times* report that Tony Blair had accepted the principle of a European army of 30 000 men. 'It is possible,' Mr Hoon said, 'that a number of European nations will combine their efforts and agree to use their joint forces in a specific context. But I would emphasise that the decision to do so will have to be taken first and foremost by NATO. Consideration is being given to the creation of a European defence identity, but it is not envisaged that British troops will serve in a European army.' —(AFP)