

'José Cutileiro: WEU's operational development and its relationship to NATO' from the NATO Review (September 1995)

Caption: In an article published in September 1995 in the NATO Review, José Cutileiro, Secretary-General of Western European Union (WEU), describes the various measures adopted to strengthen WEU's operational role and speculates on the future developments of the organisation following the European Union Intergovernmental Conference in 1996.

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WEU's operational development and its relationship to NATO

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Genuine European defence capabilities are indispensable for the European Union and for the Alliance. WEU's dual objective is to strengthen the European pillar of the Atlantic Alliance and serve as the defence component of the European Union. At the May 1995 Lisbon Ministerial meeting, significant steps were taken to strengthen WEU's operational development, establishing new decision-making mechanisms and structures. Implementation of these measures will require practical experience in crisis management, and exercises are being planned to this end. The role and place of the WEU in future European institutional arrangements will be addressed at the EU's 1996 Inter-Governmental Conference. While the links between the EU and WEU need to be strengthened, the solid relationship that WEU and NATO have built up will continue to be an important characteristic of European security arrangements.

I first had the privilege of being associated with Western European Union when it was being enlarged to include Portugal and Spain in 1988. I was in charge of the negotiations on behalf of Portugal. During this period we witnessed the first instances of operational coordination, with WEU member countries securing freedom of navigation in the waters of the Persian Gulf during the Iran-Iraq war. As a prelude to the negotiations for the accession of the two Iberian countries to the modified Brussels Treaty, the WEU had already - in the Hague Platform of October 1987 - outlined a definition of European security interests, one that was warmly welcomed by the Alliance Summit in March of the following year.

By November 1994, when my appointment as the new Secretary-General of WEU was confirmed by the WEU ministerial meeting at Noordwijk, 27 countries were taking part in the development of the Organization and in the associated political consultation: the full members (since the ratification of Greece's accession on 6 March 1995, their number has risen to 10),⁽¹⁾ the associate members (the three NATO allies who are not members of the European Union (EU) but fully participate in most WEU activities),⁽²⁾ the observers (the five EU members who are not parties to the modified Brussels Treaty),⁽³⁾ and the nine associate partners from Central Europe.⁽⁴⁾

The decisions reached at Noordwijk brought us another step closer to the realization of the European Security and Defence Identity along the path mapped out by Article J.4 of the EU's Treaty on European Union. The Ministers at the meeting adopted a set of preliminary conclusions on the formulation of a Common European Defence Policy. They also launched a "Common Reflection" among all 27 WEU countries on the new European security conditions. The aim was to evolve a shared analysis of the issues at stake and, in a second stage, agree on the appropriate responses. On the operational side, WEU had already set up its Planning Cell and was successfully engaged in three operations in former Yugoslavia. The Ministers agreed to further develop the operational capabilities of the Organization.

Six years after my first direct acquaintance with an expanding but not yet fully reactivated WEU, I found myself at the helm of an Organization well on its way to achieving its dual objective: strengthening the European pillar of the Atlantic Alliance and serving as the defence component of the European Union.

New missions

The turning point had come with the WEU Declarations of Maastricht (December 1991) and Petersberg (June 1992). They laid the practical foundations for a real operational role for WEU, defining new missions, such as crisis management and peacekeeping, that matched the specific challenges of the post-Cold War world. The broadening of WEU was a political consequence of its new dual role in the service of both the Alliance and the European Union, the latter with its new Common Foreign and Security Policy. The WEU's credibility and, in times of crisis, its ultimate effectiveness, depend on a well-structured, multinational and flexible military back-up. By the end of 1994, the WEU Council had been tasked to examine appropriate financing arrangements as a prerequisite for the balanced development of WEU's operational capabilities. A

proper WEU operational budget, together with efficient consultation mechanisms and procedures, and adequate politico-military support, were necessary to enable the Organization to react promptly to crises. WEU needed far more nerve and muscle if it was to live up to its stated missions and responsibilities.

The demands of the situation were clearly appreciated by the Portuguese authorities at the beginning of 1995 when they proposed to their WEU partners an ambitious work programme for the term of their Presidency. On that basis, significant steps forward were taken which were sanctioned by the Council of Ministers meeting in Lisbon on 15 May 1995. The first part of the Common Reflection on the new European security conditions was completed.

New operations

Concerning operational development, Ministers approved a decision which provides WEU with new decision-making mechanisms and structures, in particular the establishment of a politico-military group to advise the council on crises and crisis management. This capacity is to be enhanced by the establishment of a Situation Centre and Intelligence Section in the Planning Cell.

There is a clear need to acquire practical experience with the implementation of this Ministerial decision. Such experience can be gained through joint exercises, and Portugal has already expressed its intention to organize a crisis management exercise with the Eurocorps, based on a WEU scenario.

Ministers also welcomed the decision of France, Italy, Spain and Portugal to organize a land force (EUROFOR), designed as a rapid reaction force in the Southern region and a maritime force (EUROMARFOR) open to all WEU members. EUROFOR and EUROMARFOR will be available to WEU as well as to NATO like other European multinational forces. This initiative will strengthen Europe's operational capability for the operations envisaged in the WEU's 1992 Petersberg Declaration. The relations between WEU and these two new multinational forces are to be worked out in the coming weeks.

In the field of space activities, Ministers have approved the establishment of the Satellite Centre in Torrejon, near Madrid, as a permanent subsidiary body. The Space Group, for its part, has been instructed to concentrate on the study on proposed approaches to developing WEU's proficiency in the field of satellite imagery.

WEU's operations in former Yugoslavia (the Danube, the Adriatic and Mostar), visible expressions of WEU's commitment to European security, continue. This close cooperation between the European Union and the WEU is a good illustration of how the working relationship foreseen in the Maastricht Treaty on European Union is being put into practice.

The informal group of government experts of WEU's Western European Armaments Group and the European Union has also completed its study on the options for a European armaments policy. Decisions on setting up a European Armaments Agency will soon have to be taken.

As far as institutional aspects are concerned, an obvious challenge has been the political management of the participation of 27 countries who share the same values and aspirations but whose internal situations and external concerns vary so widely. The lead role belongs to the 18 full member states, associate members and observers. The inner circle of 10 full members performs specific tasks of an institutional and organizational nature, since they contribute 96.1 per cent of the total budget, the remaining 3.9 per cent being paid by the three associate members. The outer circle - the European Union Outreach', since the associate partnership is based on the signing of Europe Agreements with the EU - incorporates Central European countries.

One common feature is the willingness of all 27 to contribute to those "Petersberg-type" operations which could be entrusted to WEU. The ministerial organs, comprising the Secretariat and the Planning Cell in Brussels, the Institute for Security Studies in Paris and the Satellite Centre in Torrejon, support the work of the Permanent Council which meets every week, alternatively at 18 and 27.

Spain, which assumed the Presidency in July, has established two priorities. In the conceptual field, the Permanent Council will elaborate WEU's contribution to the EU's 1996 Inter-Governmental Conference, as agreed at Noordwijk. As a second part of the Common Reflection on the new European security conditions, it will also draft a document outlining a range of possible responses to the potential risks already identified in the first part of the study. Both parts, when amalgamated, would then constitute the basis for the eventual publication of a "White Paper" on European security as a shared reference for WEU countries in enhancing and strengthening their common security through converging defence policies.

From an operational viewpoint, several decisions taken at Lisbon will have to be followed up: launching the activities of the new Politico-Military Group and studying its possible links with other organizations and operational headquarters; creating a Situation Centre; setting up an Intelligence Section in the Planning Cell; preparing WEU rules of engagement with a view to implementing the Petersberg missions.

For its part, the Planning Cell will be working on a set of plans for humanitarian and evacuation operations in the context of ongoing reflections on a WEU Humanitarian Task Force and on peacekeeping and conflict prevention in Africa. The list of forces answerable to WEU (FAWEU) will be updated, taking into account the diversity of status within WEU and the newly-created multinational forces as well as those already operational.

Relations with third countries through political dialogue will continue, mainly with Eastern European countries and in the context of the WEU dialogue with non-member Mediterranean countries. The existing contacts with Russia and Ukraine are being pursued. A dialogue with Cyprus and Malta was initiated in June and, finally, the Mediterranean dialogue now encompasses the state of Israel.

Towards the IGC

The 1996 Inter-Governmental Conference (IGC) will address the role and place of WEU in future European institutional arrangements. At this stage, the outcome of the conference is unpredictable. Nor can the course of action that might be recommended in the WEU contribution to be submitted to Ministers in Madrid next November yet be foreseen. So far, few member states have clearly stated their general thinking and intentions.

One thing is clear, however: the European Union has become and will remain the main decision-making body for a whole range of issues affecting European interests. Among them are foreign and security policy issues which have a direct bearing on the activities of WEU. Therefore, the links between the two organizations will have to be strengthened. Equally clear is the necessity - acknowledged by all - to preserve the Atlantic Alliance. These two realities set a framework within which the defence cooperation of European countries must be developed.

Two considerations are likely to be of particular importance. Firstly, fundamental decisions regarding defence and security will continue to be taken on an inter-governmental basis. It is at present inconceivable that decisions on such matters as sending forces abroad to take part in military operations could be taken other than by national governments.

Secondly, the solid relationship that WEU and NATO have built up over the years will continue to be an important characteristic of post-IGC defence arrangements in Europe. The principles of complementarity, compatibility and transparency are just as relevant today. More particularly, there is a clear recognition that disparities in Europe in the coverage provided by the respective defence commitments in the WEU and NATO treaties must be avoided. Given these two considerations, WEU is well placed to continue as the focus for the further development of the European Security and Defence Identity.

A potential division of labour between the Alliance and WEU has been made clearer since the early 1990s, on the basis of the new geostrategic situation. The implementation of Article V of the WEU's Modified

Brussels Treaty remains primarily the responsibility of the Alliance. Under Article VIII, other types of operations of variable intensity may take place. For these - the so-called Petersberg tasks - WEU must be prepared to take responsibility.

The Combined Joint Task Forces (CJTFs) concept - however difficult to define and translate into operational reality - meets Europe's requirements for operations in which North Americans may not wish to participate. WEU is pulling its full weight: its paper on the "criteria and modalities for the effective use by WEU of CJTFs" was presented to NATO in June 1994; last May, WEU sent NATO a paper on the "Mechanisms and Procedures for WEU use of Alliance assets and capabilities" required for its own operations, which will help NATO to identify which assets and capabilities it could potentially make available to WEU.

Working links on CJTFs between the two organizations are being stepped up on the basis of recent decisions taken by the two Councils. Progress is being reviewed by joint sessions of the WEU and NATO Councils, now a regular quarterly feature of the relationship between the two organizations. Close contacts between the two secretariats are arranged through joint meetings and cross-attendance of relevant meetings. These are likely to increase as we move nearer to the finalization of the North Atlantic Council's report on the development of the CJTFs concept.

Institutional future

For WEU, the way forward is to give priority to its operational development on which its ultimate political credibility vis-à-vis the European Union and the Alliance rests.

Since genuine European defence capabilities are indispensable both for the European Union and for the Alliance, the European Security and Defence Identity will continue to be constructed. This will be a gradual process, requiring political will, resources and consultations with our allies. Some building blocks are already in place, although much work still has to be done. WEU's continued development will in no way prejudice future institutional options; WEU stands ready to give concrete expression to whatever option will be chosen. Regardless of its institutional future, WEU has a key role to play in shaping European security and defence.

FOOTNOTES

- (1) Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the UK.
- (2) Iceland, Norway and Turkey.
- (3) Austria, Denmark, Finland, Ireland and Sweden
- (4) Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.