

The composition of WEU

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The composition of Western European Union and the different categories of membership

Western European Union (WEU) was set up in 1954 by a modification to the Brussels Treaty of 1948. That Treaty, which established the Brussels Treaty Organisation (also known as Western Union), was signed by Belgium, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The five Member States were associated in an alliance in which the perceived Soviet threat was the main issue. In the same way, the fear of a perceived resurgence of German rearmament partly accounted for the signing of the Franco-British Dunkirk Treaty in March 1947.

In 1954, the modified Brussels Treaty brought Italy and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) into the organisation. The purpose of incorporating these countries, by anchoring the FRG definitively in the West and the market economy, was to promote European unity and encourage the progressive integration of Europe.

Other countries joined the organisation later as full members. Portugal and Spain, once they had thrown off their dictatorships, signed the protocol of accession in November 1988, with the ratification process being completed in March 1990. Greece embarked on the same process in 1992, with ratification in 1995. These ten **States** ⁽¹⁾ were the **full members** of WEU, holding all authority in the Council of WEU. They were also members of both the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), committed to abiding by the modified Brussels Treaty, the associated protocols and texts and also agreements concluded subsequently by the Member States pursuant to the Treaty.

These ten Member States were then joined by other countries holding different categories of status.

The Petersberg Council of 1992 created ‘**associate member**’ ⁽²⁾ status. This status, applying to European countries which were members of NATO but not of the EU ⁽³⁾, entitled the countries concerned to participate fully in the work of WEU and to be associated with the decisions taken by the member countries, but not to block any decision on which there was consensus among the latter. The assumption of responsibility for the Petersberg tasks ⁽⁴⁾ at the same Council also gave ‘associate members’ the right to take part in WEU military operations. The members concerned contributed to the budget for the Council, the Institute for Security Studies and the Satellite Centre until the Marseille decision of November 2000, when they were released from that obligation.

The Petersberg declaration on relations between WEU and the other European countries belonging to the EU or the Atlantic Alliance also established ‘**observer**’ status. While Denmark and Ireland were designated as ‘observers’ as early as 1992, other countries did not acquire that status until 1995, when they joined the EU — these were Austria, Finland and Sweden. Observer status, in other words, was awarded to Member States of the EU who were not full members of WEU and not members of NATO, owing to their neutrality ⁽⁵⁾. These countries were able to attend and speak at meetings of the Council of WEU. They could, however, as circumstances dictated, be required to leave following a decision by a majority or half of the full members. Observers did not contribute to the Council budget.

Lastly, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which were approached as soon as the Cold War ended, were first integrated through the setting up of a WEU consultative forum. This structure was defined at the Petersberg Council on 19 June 1992. This instrument for dialogue and cooperation between WEU and the nine countries of Central and Eastern Europe concerned ⁽⁶⁾ was taken further with the decision in Rome on 20 May 1993 to refer to the central European countries as the Forum of Consultation at ministerial meetings, although at this early stage it met only at ambassadorial level twice a year.

Following a French-German-Polish initiative in November of that year, and the contribution the new countries made to conflict management in the former Yugoslavia, these ‘consultation partners’ officially became ‘**associate partners**’ of WEU on 9 May 1994 at the Kirchberg Council meeting. The Kirchberg Declaration entitled the ‘associate partners’ to take part in meetings of the Council and be informed of the activities of its working parties, and allowed them to take part in these on an ad hoc basis. Other rules applying to them specifically had been set out in a document of 3 May 1994 relating to their financial contribution, their right to

be informed and the arrangements for the participation of the ‘associate partners’ in the work of the Council, the Planning Cell, the Institute for Security Studies and actual missions. The list of ‘associate partners’ changed as a result of diplomatic steps undertaken by the Member States. The Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland became members of NATO in 1999 and acquired ‘associate member’ status in the same year. Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia continued to be ‘associate partners’ despite being admitted to the EU, following the decision of the ten-member Council of WEU on 24 June 2001 to freeze statuses within the organisation ⁽⁷⁾. The point here was to decline to incorporate new full members into the organisation just as it was being dismantled at the wish of the governments concerned by their change of status.

The effect of this variable-geometry arrangement in the statuses of the Member States was that it enabled WEU to broaden its experience of joint security and build bridges of cooperation between EU and NATO countries and those countries in the wider Europe which were associated only with one or other of these two organisations or had applied to join them. This was a way for them to be involved in a discussion taking place, more often than not, in other forums from which they were excluded.

It should be noted that the transfer of crisis-management functions to the EU (by the WEU Marseille Council, November 2000) had no effect on the composition of WEU. Countries with different statuses in WEU were able to continue appointing representatives to the Council. And although no ministerial Council was called following the last one in Marseille, the Council could still meet in 21-member format (with the ‘associate members’ and the ‘observers’) or with 28 members (adding the ‘associate partners’) to discuss matters relating to the WEU Parliamentary Assembly and requiring a special contribution from countries which were not full members, as soon as their members of parliament took part in the work of the Assembly.

The table below classifies WEU Member States by their status in the Council of WEU:

The WEU Member States

As regards status in the **Parliamentary Assembly**, this is rather different owing to the ‘symbolic’ decisions taken by the members of the WEU Assembly in recent years. As the decision by the ten-member Council of WEU (the Marseille Council of 2000) involved releasing associate members from the requirement to contribute to the budget ⁽⁸⁾, this merely widened the perceptible gap and difference between the status of the observer countries and that of the associates or associate partners in the minds of EU officials. The WEU Assembly in fact wanted the associate countries to retain their acquired rights when the Petersberg tasks were transferred from WEU to the EU. The discussions surrounding the attitude of Turkey and the concerns of Bulgaria and Romania (which were only part of a second wave of accessions to the Union) are both perfect illustrations of this situation.

In 2003 the Assembly of WEU allowed members of parliament from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia-Montenegro to attend debates of the Assembly as ‘special guests’ with speaking but not voting rights. Ukraine, like Russia, became a ‘permanent guest’ ⁽⁹⁾.

As the Council of WEU was unwilling to admit the new EU and NATO countries to full membership of an organisation of 28 members, taking all categories of status together — and notwithstanding the declaration by the Member States of WEU annexed to the Maastricht Treaty of 10 December 1991 ⁽¹⁰⁾ and never withdrawn by the Council of WEU — the Assembly decided in June 2004 to grant voting rights similar to those of the full members to the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia; Bulgaria and Romania were to have voting rights similar to those of the associate members, and Cyprus and Malta would have rights similar to those of the permanent observers. Croatia would enjoy the same prerogatives as the associate partners.

In 2005 committee voting rights were granted to the parliamentary delegations from the permanent observer countries and affiliate permanent observers ⁽¹¹⁾. The representatives of Austria, Cyprus (affiliate), Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Malta (affiliate) and Sweden were from then on referred to by the Assembly of WEU as

‘permanent observer members’⁽¹²⁾ or ‘affiliate permanent observer members’⁽¹³⁾ of the Assembly of WEU. These delegations would sit as ‘associate members’ and ‘affiliate associate members’ without voting rights in the enlarged Standing Committee⁽¹⁴⁾.

Other statutory modifications were made following changes in the position held by certain countries in the European set-up.

In line with the new Assembly regulation of 6 May 2008 laying down the statuses of the members and the composition of the Assembly, four different statuses in the Assembly were finalised, each with different rights attaching to it⁽¹⁵⁾, as shown in the following table:

The delegations to the Assembly of WEU

(December 2009)

(1) Belgium, France, Reunified Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom.

(2) Cf. The third part of the Petersberg Declaration on relations between WEU and the other European States belonging to the EU or NATO.

(3) Iceland, Norway, Turkey.

(4) Military units from WEU Member States, acting under WEU authority, could be used for humanitarian missions or missions to evacuate Member States’ nationals; peace-keeping missions; combat force missions for crisis-management purposes, including missions to restore peace.

(5) Apart from Denmark, which is a member of both the EU and NATO but has an opt-out on defence matters as part of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) of the EU. Denmark is therefore listed as an ‘observer’.

(6) At the time, these were Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.

(7) At the 1352nd meeting of the Council of WEU, held on 28 June 2001, the Secretary-General (following up on a decision taken on 14 June of the same year) stated that, as regards the period beginning on 1 January 2002, the Member States considered that, in the current and foreseeable future circumstances, no official alteration needed to be made in the status of countries which were not full members.

(8) This decision was to have the paradoxical effect of increasing the costs of maintaining the buildings in the Avenue du Président Wilson for which the Assembly was responsible, as it had to bear two thirds of the management costs (previously the ratio was the other way round) at a time when the Council of WEU wanted to freeze the 2002 budget at the 2001 level (zero growth).

(9) Cf. Decision 26 adopted in October 2003 on the follow-up to Order 118 of 3 June 2003 and Order 119 of 22 October 2003, ratified by the Assembly, on security policy in an enlarged Europe.

(10) ‘States which are members of the European Union are invited to accede to WEU on conditions to be agreed in accordance with Article XI of the modified Brussels Treaty, or to become observers if they so wish. Simultaneously, other European Member States of NATO are invited to become associate members of WEU in a way which will give them the possibility of participating fully in the activities of WEU.’ (extract)

(11) Cf. Decision 28 of the Assembly of WEU supplemented on 13 June 2005 by the implementation of Decision 29 and Order 120 of the Assembly.

(12) Austria, Denmark, Finland, Ireland and Sweden.

(13) Cyprus and Malta.

(14) The enlarged Standing Committee consisted of the members of the Presidential Committee (the steering body of the Assembly, consisting of the President, his or her predecessors, the Vice-Presidents, the chairmen of the committees and a member designated by each political group and each delegation from an associate Member State) and members of the Assembly, and was constituted for each session. The Standing Committee’s role was to consider reports from the committees and act on behalf of the Assembly.

(15) Speaking rights, voting rights, the right to table amendments, the right to be rapporteur, the right to be co-rapporteur.