

Message from the WEU Council to the Assembly (Strasbourg, 5 July 1955)

Caption: On 5 July 1955, Paul-Henri Spaak, Belgian Foreign Minister and President of the Council of Western European Union (WEU), gives an address at the first session of the Assembly of WEU.

Source: Message addressed by the Council of Western European Union to the Assembly of WEU. First session held on Tuesday, 5th July, 1955, Speech delivered by Mr. Spaak, President of the Council. Strasbourg: Assembly of Western European Union, 05.07.1955. 5 p.

National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew. <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk>, Records of international organizations, DG. Copies of records of the Brussels Treaty Organisation and Western European Union. Brussels Treaty Organisations and Western European Union: Microfilm copies of files, DG 1.

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URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/message_from_the_weu_council_to_the_assembly_strasbourg_5_july_1955-en-6f325dd9-a444-4251-a816-c4988bad6024.html

Publication date: 14/05/2013

WESTERN EUROPEAN UNION

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ASSEMBLY

MESSAGE ADDRESSED BY THE COUNCIL OF WESTERN EUROPEAN UNION
TO THE ASSEMBLY OF W.E.U.

First Session held on Tuesday, 5th July, 1955,
at 5 pm

SPEECH DELIVERED BY MR. SPAAK, PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Mademoiselle, Gentlemen,

In my capacity as acting President of the Council of Western European Union, I have the honour, on behalf of my colleagues, to greet you on this your first meeting and to wish you all possible success in your work.

In view of the composition of this Assembly, it would be presumptuous for me to recall the circumstances and the events which have led to the setting-up of the Western European Union and to tell you the part which will be yours to play in it.

I would, however, like to emphasise briefly the importance of this occasion.

The Council of Western European Union will each year submit for your attention a report on its activities. You, for your part, will be called upon to discuss it.

Now, the general objectives which the member Powers have set themselves are both numerous and extensive. Their purpose is to strengthen peace, promote unity, and encourage the progressive integration of Europe and closer cooperation between themselves and with other European agencies.

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As you will realise, this opens the way to a vast field of activities and experiments in which you will not only be asked to participate, but which, even more important, may be prompted by your inspiration. The success of the task undertaken will depend to a very large extent on your observations, on your possible criticisms and perhaps even on your encouragements.

The programme of Western European Union opens up vast possibilities. It will be the duty of the men who sit in its institutions, of the Ministers of the Council, of the representatives in the Assembly to turn these possibilities into realities.

But apart from these general functions, the scope of which only the future will determine, the Council of the Union, and therefore your Assembly also, are already faced by two specific tasks of a far-reaching importance: the control of armaments by virtue of the Treaty itself and the control of the activities of the Saar Commissioner which the Council undertook in its Resolution of 11th May, 1955.

Surely we are all convinced that a controlled limitation of armaments is the fundamental basis for a sound international policy. As members of the Union, we amongst ourselves will attempt to reach this end. In so doing, we are setting the rest of the world an excellent example. If we succeed, others may perhaps experience the desire and find the will to imitate us.

The American Secretary of State said only the other day, speaking about our attempt, that the implementation of a similar system by the Eastern bloc would be a step forward in easing the world situation, for by such systems groups of nations have enough weapons to defend themselves, but not enough to attack.

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The Armaments Control Agency is now set up. Its organisation is still in embryo. The tasks which it will fulfil raise complex questions which it would have to solve in close cooperation with the Council of the Union, the Governments concerned and the Atlantic Pact Organisation.

You will, of course, be kept informed of all its activities and you will be asked to assess the results achieved.

It seems hardly possible for me to mention in your presence the questions relating to the Saar without paying tribute to the considerable work done in this sphere by the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe. Had such work not been done, it is doubtful whether France and Germany could have concluded their Agreement of 23rd October, 1954.

As you all know, this Agreement has given the Saar a European status within Western European Union.

This Agreement was jointly submitted to the Council of the Union on 11th May by the Governments of France and Germany, and the Council decided to approve those provisions of the Agreement which required its approbation, and to assume the responsibilities, powers and duties attributed to it by the Agreement.

The Commission for the supervision of the Saar referendum was already set up by 22nd June. It has embarked upon its work. In particular, it must ensure that the Saar legislation is in conformity with the Franco-German Agreement of 23rd October, 1954.

Should the Commission, or the Council itself, be required to intervene, they would fulfil their task with strict impartiality.

Before concluding this brief message, I would like to recall the delicate questions resulting from the organisation of your Assembly and your working methods.

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Other European Assemblies, which have some attributions closely related and even similar to yours, are in existence. Our European structure is not always rational. Events have sometimes forced upon us a certain measure of disorder. In all awareness of this fact, we must as far as possible avoid its unfortunate consequences.

The Council of the Union has not wished to force its views upon you. On the contrary, trusting in your experience and in your wisdom, it has intended to leave you the fullest possible freedom whilst taking the liberty to put forward a few suggestions.

In its opinion, the Assembly itself, within the framework of the agreements setting up Western European Union, is responsible for its organisation and its working methods, and for defining its relations with other assemblies. Nevertheless, the Council thinks it desirable, for your guidance, to draw the attention of the members of the Assembly to the following points.

The Assembly of Western European Union must be independent of other Assemblies and have its own Clerk. Once this principle has been observed, according to a procedure to be laid down by itself, it would be advisable if the Assembly, for economical and practical reasons, were to avail itself, to the fullest possible extent, of the facilities of the Council of Europe. The agreements reached between the joint Assembly of the E.C.S.C. and the Council of Europe might serve as a useful precedent for the measures to be taken for refunding to that organisation the expenditure involved by the seconding of technical personnel to the Assembly of Western European Union. In the same way, the Assembly will probably deem it advisable to avoid duplication of services when considering the decisions to be taken concerning the setting up of its commissions.

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The Council suggests that the powers, organisation and working methods of the Assembly of the Union should follow the lines of the measures governing the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe, with particular reference to the budgetary provisions. Nevertheless, it does not consider that it should inform the Assembly of the annual Budget of Western European Union before its final adoption by the Council.

In so far as the relations between the Assembly and the Council are concerned, the normal procedure will be for the Minister who at the time is in the Chair, or for one of the other members of the Council, to submit the annual report. The Council will give the Assembly all the necessary information it will require to examine the reports submitted and to formulate its reply with full knowledge of the facts. Nevertheless, it is considered that officials of Western European Union should not be summoned before the Assembly for this purpose.

Mademoiselle, Gentlemen, I am convinced that it will be possible in this way to lay the grounds of a fruitful collaboration, not only between your Assembly and the Council but also between your Assembly and the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe.

Thus, by a new initiative, we will progress towards that more closely united Europe in which all of us see a great force at the service of peace, and an organisation able to secure for our peoples the conditions of existence to which they aspire.
