

Economic, social and cultural activities

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Although the Brussels Treaty can be seen as the embryo of a European defence system, built on a remnant left over from World War II, its content is wider-ranging than that, as its title, ‘Treaty of Economic, Social and Cultural Collaboration and Collective Self-Defence’, and the preamble to it show. The preamble refers to Articles I, II and III, which cover the economic, social and cultural aspects respectively. On the economic aspect, the Treaty talks, in relation to the High Contracting Parties, of ‘the close community of their interests and of the necessity of uniting in order to promote the economic recovery of Europe’, a Europe ravaged by war. It speaks of so organising and coordinating their economic activities ‘as to produce the best possible results, by the elimination of conflict in their economic policies, the co-ordination of production and the development of commercial exchanges’. Article II speaks of combining the efforts of the High Contracting Parties ‘both by direct consultation and in specialized agencies, to promote the attainment of a higher standard of living by their peoples and to develop on corresponding lines the social and other related services of their countries’. Article III, lastly, puts the emphasis on the idea of the Parties’ working ‘to lead their peoples towards a better understanding of the principles which form the basis of their common civilization and to promote cultural exchanges by conventions between themselves or by other means’.

Where military questions were concerned, it was in the end the Atlantic Alliance which was to be the primary instrument for bringing about solidarity and military cooperation, at the expense of the Western Union and its Western Union Defence Organisation (WUDO) ⁽¹⁾, and then of Western European Union (WEU) ⁽²⁾. In the economic field, similarly, Article I, paragraph 2, says that the cooperation concerned would not involve any duplication with the work of other economic organisations in which the High Contracting Parties were or would be represented and would not hinder their work in any way but would, on the contrary, give the most effective possible assistance to the work of such organisations. As regards the social aspect, it also relied on the idea of joint consultations among Member States with a view to implementing recommendations relating to social matters approved outside WEU, by the same countries, in the specialised agencies.

So the process of divestment was already written into the Brussels Treaty. The Western Union was stripped, step by step, of its fundamental powers with the signing, in Paris on 16 April 1948, of the convention establishing the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC) ⁽³⁾, the signing in Washington on 4 April 1949 of the North Atlantic Treaty (the Atlantic Alliance), the signing in London on 5 May 1949 of the Statute of the Council of Europe and the signing of the Treaty of Paris on 18 April 1951 establishing the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC).

The reason why the wording of the Brussels Treaty is noticeably vague was that there were differences of opinion between London and the capitals on the mainland, especially those of the Benelux countries, over the importance to be attached to the building of a united Europe. The British were afraid that a European mainland-dominated executive that was too daring, too ‘uncontrollable’ and much too federalist might emerge. Other factors were the avowed dependence on other forums and organisations better equipped to function in the fields mentioned above, and the insistence on standing behind the social and cultural pacts agreed between certain countries.

The economic dimension was eventually taken over by the OEEC and the ECSC, pending the setting up of the European Economic Community (EEC) by the Treaty of Rome in 1957. Then the WEU Council acted as a relay in the dialogue between the EEC and the United Kingdom.

As regards the social and cultural dimensions, despite several moves in those areas by the Council, they were soon cut down to the basics when no funding was earmarked for these subsidiary aspects.

Lastly, the Statute of the Council of Europe, the aim of which was ‘to achieve a greater unity between its members for the purpose of safeguarding and realising the ideals and principles which are their common heritage and facilitating their economic and social progress’ and which included among its spheres of competence ‘action in economic, social, cultural, scientific, legal and administrative matters and in the maintenance and further realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms’, paved the way for a

transfer of power to it which started in April 1959 and was completed by May 1960. The British and the Scandinavians tried to obstruct it for a time before requiring the Council of Europe to be to some extent intergovernmental in character and imposing an international Parliamentary Assembly (the first in history) on it, though one with purely deliberative powers.

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(1) From 1948 to 1950 WUODO was the only European defence structure (without American troops) before the Atlantic Alliance took over the operational side in 1951 and Western Union finally stood down its operational development to the advantage of the Washington Treaty (NATO). The form of common solidarity defined in Article 5 of that Treaty was more acceptable to the US Senate because it was less binding than that prescribed by the Brussels Treaty in the area of solidarity constituted by collective defence.

(2) See Article IV of the modified Brussels Treaty and the principle of subordination to the forums and structures of the Atlantic Alliance which it lays down.

(3) The purpose of this organisation was, firstly, to prepare a European recovery programme which justified the granting of US aid and, secondly, to allocate Marshall Plan funds. The OEEC was replaced by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in September 1961.