

## 'WEU: Ten jointly announce dissolution of Western European Union' from Europe Diplomacy and Defence (7 April 2010)

**Caption:** On 7 April 2010, the journal Europe Diplomacy and Defence comments on the decision taken on 31 March 2010 by the Member States of Western European Union (WEU) to terminate the Treaty of Brussels and close WEU by June 2011.

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## WEU: TEN JOINTLY ANNOUNCE DISSOLUTION OF WESTERN EUROPEAN UNION

Brussels, 07/04/2010 (EDD) – Citing the mutual assistance clause enshrined in the Treaty of Lisbon (article 42.7), 10 States belonging to the Western European Union (WEU) agreed on Wednesday 31 March to initiate procedures to terminate the modified Treaty of Brussels. "With the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, a new phase in European security and defence begins", read the declaration by the Presidency of the Permanent Council of the WEU, which was published on Wednesday on behalf of France, Germany, Belgium, Spain, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal and the United Kingdom, which are the main contracting parties to the modified Treaty of Brussels. It states that article 42.7 of the Treaty on the European Union now stipulates that "if a Member State is the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other Member States shall have towards it an obligation of aid and assistance by all the means in their power" and that commitments and cooperation in this field "shall be consistent with commitments in NATO". "The WEU has therefore accomplished its historical role. In this light we the States Parties to the Modified Brussels Treaty have collectively decided to terminate the Treaty, thereby effectively closing the organisation, and in line with its article XII, will notify the Treaty's depository (Belgium: Ed) in accordance with national procedures", this political declaration continues. The States reiterate their commitment to the principle of mutual defence as it features in article V of the Treaty of Brussels, which brought the WEU into being.

The day before, Tuesday 30 March, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Chris Bryant, made the UK's intention of denouncing the Treaty official. He explained that the objective of collective defence underlying the creation of the WEU has become symbolic since the creation of NATO, which remains "the forum and foundation of the collective defence of the allies". The WEU's operational role has been succeeded by the EU with the creation of the common defence and security policy. Although the United Kingdom recognizes the role played by the Parliamentary Assembly of the WEU in involving the national parliaments in the issue of European defence, London no longer believes that "this justifies the cost of over 2 million (euros) a year to the UK alone", Mr Bryant added, quoted in a Foreign Office press release. This 2 million corresponds to the UK's contribution to the funding of all of the activities of the WEU. The United Kingdom's contribution to the budget of the Assembly (6.35 9 million euros) is in the region of 1.1 million. Similarly, the head of Belgian diplomacy, Steven Vanackere, acknowledged that "from budgetary point of view, keeping the WEU has become difficult to justify". The WEU, its Paris-based Parliamentary Assembly and its Secretariat General in Brussels, with around 60 staff and a total budget of 13 million euros, will therefore cease to exist by the end of June 2001. The Permanent Council of the WEU has a year to arrange the wind-down of the organisation's activities. Legally, the effects of the Treaty cease to be binding upon each party after a period of one year from receipt of the notice of intention to denounce the Treaty, which each party must send to the Belgian authorities.

Nonetheless, a number of observers have noted that the dissolution of the organisation still leaves the question of parliamentary control in the field of European defence, which, in the view of London at least, remains an inter-governmental policy, thereby not coming under the supranational control of the European Parliament. Additionally, the Treaty of Lisbon does not recognize any new role for the European Parliament in this area. In Wednesday's declaration, the 10 States "encourage" the enhancement of into Parliamentary dialogue in this area, "including with candidates for EU accession and other interested States". Protocol 1 appended to the Treaty of Lisbon (protocol on the reinforced role of the national parliaments in the EU) could be used as a basis for cooperation of this kind. On Wednesday, the European Affairs Committee of the French Senate adopted a resolution in which it states that the determination of the WEU Assembly should be "subject to the creation of a structure bringing together members of Parliament specialising in defence issues of the 27 Member States of the EU", or at least from such of those states as wish to participate. This structure could be designed on the COSAC (Conference of European Affairs Committees) model, with a maximum of six parliamentarians from each Member State, meeting once every six months, together with six members of the European parliament. The organisation and secretariat of structure would be the responsibility of the national parliaments, on a rotational basis of one meeting every six months, the French senators suggest. In a press release, Mr Bryant also stated that during the transitional period of 12 months, his country would continue discussions with its partners on the "trans-European" parliamentary control of European defence. The current President of the Assembly, Robert Walter (Conservative party), quoted by the AFP, has proposed the creation, with London's support, of a "permanent conference" of representatives of the national parliaments. This new mechanism would have effective parliamentary control powers, on the actors and activities of the EU.

The assembly, which is due to meet in June for its 58th plenary session, is currently made up of representatives from the national parliaments of all of the Member States of the EU. Five States which are not