Letter from Adolf C. McCarthy to Sir John William Denys Margetson on the WEU Standing Armaments Committee (London, 17 October 1975)

Caption: On 17 October 1975, Adolf C. McCarthy of the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) sends a letter to Sir John William Denys Margetson, Head of Chancery at the United Kingdom delegation to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), concerning the future of Western European Union's Standing Armaments Committee (SAC). The FCO advocates abolishing the SAC, arguing that it serves no useful purpose and is a burden to the Ministry of Defence. However, the FCO advises proceeding cautiously, since although the French appear to be losing interest in maintaining the SAC, too firm an insistence on the part of the British to abolish it could have the opposite effect of what is desired.

Source: The National Archives of the UK (TNA). Foreign Office, Western Organisations and Co-ordination Department and Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Western Organisations Department: Registered Files (W and WD Series). WESTERN EUROPEAN UNION (WEU). Future of Standing Armaments Committee of Western European Union. 01/01/1975-31/12/1975, FCO 41/1749 (Former Reference Dep: WDU 11/1 PART B).

URL:
http://www.cvce.eu/obj/letter_from_adolf_c_mccarthy_to_sir_john_william_denys_margetson_on_the_weu_standing_armaments_committee_london_17_october_1975-en-b1398e4c-7f44-4908-8e6d-eab9a54e66cf.html

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J W D Margetson Esq
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BRUSSELS

WDU 11/1

Your reference AGEN 10/3

Our reference WDU 11/1

Date 17 October 1975

Dear John,

WEU STANDING ARMAMENTS COMMITTEE

1. Responsibility for WEU has now passed to David Goodall as Head of WED. He is on leave and that is why I am replying to (45) your letter of 6 October to John Wilberforce.

2. We would very much like to see the SAC abolished or put into cold storage.. We agree that it serves no useful purpose and is a burden, particularly to the MOD. Unfortunately, although as you say there are signs that the French may be losing interest in it, I do not think we have yet reached a stage at which we could take an initiative without a risk of upsetting the French at a time when we are all hoping that they may shortly feel able to take a constructive part in European arms co-operation in a wider context. The result could be a new lease of inert life for the SAC and its French director instead of a French signature on the death warrant.

3. In accordance with the decision of the WEU Ministerial Council last February the Belgian proposals for the future of the SAC remain on the agenda of the Permanent Council. The Belgians' last pronouncement on the subject was that "diplomatic contacts on these problems" should continue between member governments before the debate in the Council was resumed. At the last meeting (15 October) when this item was called no-one said a word, except the Acting Secretary-General (in the chair) who said that, if no-one objected, he would place the item on the agenda for the next meeting (13 November).

4. Despite the valid points made in Bill Berry's letter of 16 October to John Wilberforce, any initiative we might take which implied rejection of the Belgian proposals would, I feel sure, be rebuffed by the Belgians as well as by the French. I (55) see from Christopher Lush's letter of 15 October that he agrees as far as the French are concerned. While making it clear privately that reactivation of the SAC was not acceptable to us we have, in the Council, been careful not to come out in

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flat opposition to the Belgians but to recognise the existence of the problem they are trying to solve and to show willingness to examine their proposals in depth. We can drop this line when it becomes clear that they have dropped their proposals but that is not yet.

Yours

Dolf

A C McCarthy
Western European Department

cc:

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