

Letter from the British Foreign Office to the Ministry of Defence concerning the WEU agreement on the control of forces under national command in Europe (London, 10 July 1963)

Caption: On 10 July 1963, Thomas Anthony Keith Elliott of the British Foreign Office sends a letter to L. J. Sabatini at the British Ministry of Defence in which he emphasises the importance of considering in detail how the Western European Union (WEU) agreement on the control of forces under national command in Europe will affect the United Kingdom. The letter outlines the reasons why the UK Government should press for a rapid implementation of this agreement. Firstly, WEU is the United Kingdom's only organic link to the Six (the EEC), and secondly, the agreement will control the growing number of German forces under national command. In order to reply promptly to WEU, the Foreign Office stresses the need to identify which of the British forces under national command on the mainland of Europe fall into which of the WEU control categories, and to identify the armaments associated with these forces.

Source: The National Archives of the UK (TNA). Foreign Office, Political Departments: General Correspondence from 1906-1966. WESTERN ORGANISATIONS & PLANNING (WP): Western European Union (WUW). Meeting of WEU Ministers at The Hague: Armed forces controlled by WEU: UK contribution to European forces; FRG forces. 01/01/1963-31/12/1963, FO 371/173486 (Former Reference Dep: File 1192 (pp 1 to 20)).

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Last updated: 13/10/2016

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FOREIGN OFFICE

LONDON S.W.1.

July 10, 1963

We shall shortly need to consider in detail how H.M.G. will be affected by the W.E.U. Agreement on the control of forces under national command in Europe (text attached).

2. You will have seen the latest correspondence between the Foreign Office and the U.K. Delegation to NATO resting with Tomlinson's letter of June 28 to Lord Hood. C(63)58 of May 22 and C(63)75 of July 1 are also relevant. You may also like to see the British Aide Memoire handed to the Dutch, and enclosed with Fielding's letter of June 27 to Mumford, copied to McDonnell.

3. Briefly, the Agreement, which was fully ratified by all W.E.U. governments on November 13, 1961, provides for differing degrees of control over the following three categories of forces and their associated armaments:-

- (i) forces for the common defence in the area of ACE recognized by NATO as being suitable to remain under national command;
- (ii) forces under national command on the mainland of Europe intended for the defence of overseas territories;
- (iii) remaining forces - i.e. internal defence and police forces on the mainland of Europe.

Implementation of the Agreement has been delayed for lack of agreement in NATO on the forces at (i). This has now been put right and the necessary information conveyed to W.E.U. It therefore remains for W.E.U. Governments to notify their forces in categories (ii) and (iii) and for tables to be drawn up for approval by the W.E.U. Council.

4. It seems plain to us that there are two good reasons for pressing for the implementation of this Agreement at the earliest possible date. In the first place, W.E.U. is our only organic link with the Six and must be kept a going concern. Secondly, the Agreement will control the growing number of German forces under national command. If the Agreement were not carried into effect until the autumn of 1964, this fact would not normally be reported to the W.E.U. Assembly until the spring of 1965. This would be unjustifiably late for an Agreement fully ratified by Governments in 1961. It might also cause some irritation in the NATO Council, who have been under pressure to supply their information about forces for the common defence with the minimum delay. We are therefore urging in the W.E.U. Council completion of the necessary control tables by this autumn and the submission of a special report to this effect to be put to the Assembly at their annual meeting in December, 1963. We hope that the Council will shortly agree that the Secretary-General should formally invite Governments to submit details of levels of forces as soon as possible, and instruct General Lombardi of the Arms Control Agency to send out a questionnaire about armaments.

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L.J. Sabatini Esq.,
Ministry of Defence.

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6. From the national point of view, therefore, the next step will be to identify:-

- (a) which of our forces under national command on the mainland of Europe fall into which of the control categories mentioned in paragraph 3 above;
- (b) the armaments associated with the forces at (a).

It would be helpful if we could clear our minds on this fairly soon, so that we can reply promptly to WEU when they ask us for the information.

7. There will, I imagine, be no great difficulty about notifying the forces at (a). We have already notified to NATO the forces which we maintain in ACE for the common defence (U.K. A.I.R. No. 145 of December, 1962.) I assume that our only other forces under national command are the Berlin garrison (who do not come within the boundaries of ACE and cannot therefore be considered as forces for the common defence); and certain units, including a troop of artillery, at Gibraltar, which should no doubt be considered as internal defence and police forces rather than as forces maintained on the Continent for the defence of territories elsewhere overseas. (The Defence White Paper for 1962 said that "although Army garrisons for local defence purposes will be maintained in Gibraltar and Malta, neither of them is now available for military operations elsewhere.")

8. The task of identifying the arrangements at (b) may be somewhat more difficult. W.E.U. are concerned only with the major weapons listed in Annexe IV of Protocol No. III of the Revised Brussels Treaty. The United Kingdom, in common with all the other W.E.U. Governments, have, however, already notified to the Agency the quantities of such armaments held on the mainland of Europe for all forces (i.e. both under NATO and national command). No doubt the experts in the Service Departments will want to go into this, but it seems on the face of it quite likely that we need only send in to W.E.U. a short supplementary note indicating which armaments on the list belong to which categories of forces.

9. If you agree, it might perhaps be useful if we could have a short meeting before long to discuss procedure. As I shall be away on a course next week, you may like to follow the matter up with Leslie Fielding. I am sending you spare copies of this letter with its enclosure for any further distribution you may wish to make.

(T.A.K. Elliott)