

## Internal note from the Foreign Office on the reduction of WEU activity (2 November 1981)

**Caption:** On 2 November 1981, an internal note from the Western European Department of the British Foreign Office emphasises that the British Government is keen to reduce the scale of activity of Western European Union (WEU). It recommends that efforts should be made to persuade the other Member States to agree to a lower frequency of controls by the Agency for the Control of Armaments (ACA), which would result in useful economies. Despite these cuts, the United Kingdom should continue to give full political support to WEU, including its commitment to maintain forces on the European continent. The note draws attention to the need to convince France and Italy, who have blocked the necessary consensus and do not support the British proposal to reduce the cost of the ministerial organs of WEU by some 15% over the next few years.

**Source:** The National Archives of the UK (TNA). Foreign Office, Western Department and Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Western European Department: Registered Files (R and WR Series). WESTERN EUROPEAN UNION. British policy towards the Western European Union. 01/01/1981-31/12/1981, FCO 33/5232 (Former Reference Dep: WRU 22/1).

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[http://www.cvce.eu/obj/internal\\_note\\_from\\_the\\_foreign\\_office\\_on\\_the\\_reduction\\_of\\_weu\\_activity\\_2\\_november\\_1981-en-366f1495-29bc-4d99-9718-62eb74aaed6c.html](http://www.cvce.eu/obj/internal_note_from_the_foreign_office_on_the_reduction_of_weu_activity_2_november_1981-en-366f1495-29bc-4d99-9718-62eb74aaed6c.html)



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WRU 022/11	
Mr Fergusson	17. Gladstone
✓	Jac 24/12

Mr. Cunniff

pa do 23/12

We need  
 a) a defensive brief for the summit  
 b) a detailed brief (? paper) for the next Council

WESTERN EUROPEAN UNION : REDUCTION IN THE LEVEL OF ACTIVITY

PROBLEM

A

1. The (Parliamentary) Assembly of WEU has recommended that member States consider lifting further restrictions on German armaments production and reducing the list of conventional weapons controlled by the ACA. Since the controls bear primarily on the Federal Republic of Germany this is a politically sensitive subject and Ministers will no doubt wish to be consulted.

RECOMMENDATION

2. I recommend:

B

- a) that we resist any general review of annexes III and IV of Protocol No III;
- b) that we try to persuade other member States to agree to a lower frequency of controls (this would throw up useful economies); and
- c) that the Secretary of State take the opportunity provided by the Anglo/Italian Summit on 9 November, to hand over to Signor Colombo an aide memoire of which I submit a draft.

BACKGROUND

C

3. Following my submission of 29 May on the future of WEU, Mr Hurd agreed that we should continue to give full political support to the WEU, including the British commitment to maintain forces on the Continent, but that we should try to reduce the scale of WEU activity.

4. Primarily because the Italians and the French have blocked the necessary consensus, an Ad Hoc Working Group set up to review the activities of WEU failed to produce any

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worthwhile savings, but we are still seeking to reduce the cost of the Ministerial organs of WEU by some 15% in real terms in the next three or four years. We are at present supported by the FRG and the Netherlands; Belgium and Luxembourg will probably go along with us. However, since the WEU Council works by consensus, we need to win the French and Italians over as well. At a recent meeting of the WEU Council, the French and Italian Permanent Representatives (but also others) stressed that their Governments regarded the WEU as an important body which must be kept in being in case we one day needed to fall back on it. The French Ambassador warned that any attempt to change its present structure might be misinterpreted by the public and the Soviet Union. There is therefore no prospect of securing savings through revision of the Treaty or through a substantial rejigging of the three Treaty-based organs - the Secretariat General, the Assembly and the ACA.

5. However, there are no good contemporary political reasons for requiring the ACA to carry out its control activities as zealously as it does; and the Standing Armaments Committee, which is not Treaty-based and whose functions have been effectively usurped by the IEPG, does not need to be active at all. Public opinion would be unlikely to notice or regret a diminution of the activities of these two bodies. The draft Aide Memoire suggests ways in which such a diminution could be brought about.

6. The SAC and ACA together will cost £2.2 million this year. It should be possible to halve these costs in real terms. Since the FCO contributes 20% of the cost of WEU there is therefore a prospect of saving £200,000 a year at today's prices in the longer term. But it appears that we can only hope to make progress towards this goal by raising the matter to the political level.

*At the  
right moment.*

D A S Gladstone  
Western European Department

2 November 1981

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I agree with 2(a) & (b). But I do not  
think that we can ask the S/State to focus  
on WEU between his return from S/Arabia  
& the A/I Summit. In any case, I believe  
that we should not start putting forward  
detailed suggestions for possible economies, let  
alone at Ministerial level, until the next  
round of the Permanent Council's discussion,  
on 23 November.

  
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