

Western European Union (WEU)

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Western European Union

On 17 March 1948, the United Kingdom, France and the Benelux countries signed the Treaty of Brussels establishing Western Union, which provided for a system of automatic mutual assistance in the event of armed aggression in Europe. The Treaty was amended by the Paris Accords of 23 October 1954, following the failure of the European Defence Community (EDC).

The Paris Accords, which were seen as an alternative solution to the failed plan for a European army, established Western European Union (WEU). They marked the end to the occupation of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and endorsed the accession of West Germany and Italy to the Brussels Treaty. Alongside the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs that already existed, the new Treaty created a consultative parliamentary Assembly, an Agency for the Control of Armaments, and a Standing Armaments Committee. In order not to offend European public opinion, which was still hostile towards a now officially authorised German rearmament, the Paris Accords prohibited Germany from manufacturing or acquiring ABC (atomic, biological or chemical) weapons of mass destruction. This time, the French National Assembly accepted the rearmament of West Germany. West Germany was now able to establish its own army, the *Bundeswehr*, which joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) on 5 May 1955.

The Soviets, who accompanied any negotiations on German rearmament with an intense propaganda campaign of their own, reacted immediately with the conclusion of a treaty of cooperation and mutual assistance between the eight Eastern bloc countries (the USSR, Poland, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania and Hungary). Signed on 14 May 1955, this became known as the Warsaw Pact and, in many respects, mirrored the Atlantic Pact. The East German 'Garrisoned People's Police' (*Kasernierte Volkspolizei*), an army in all but name, became the National People's Army (*Nationale Volksarmee*).

WEU was the only European defence organisation. To avoid duplication of effort, powers and responsibilities relating to social and cultural aspects enshrined in the Brussels Treaty were transferred to the Council of Europe.