

'The WEU has built a "platform": We must wait for the rest' from Europe (30 October 1987)

Caption: On 30 October 1987, Emanuele Gazzo, Chief Editor of Agence Europe, comments on the establishment of a 'Platform on European Security Interests' by Western European Union (WEU) on 27 October and speculates on the actual powers of WEU.

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EDITORIAL

The WEU has built a "platform": We must wait for the rest

A platform (which in French is hyphenated) is basically a flat, perhaps even raised surface, which one is supposed to be able to place heavy weights on. The British use the word platform with a very special significant meaning in political language. In this case, it is an ensemble of ideas or principles on which a policy may eventually be built and explained. This means that as soon as the platform exists, it must be completed by a construction, even, figuratively speaking, by an action programme or, even better, by actions.

In the present case (our readers will have gathered that this concerns the document which was adopted on Tuesday by the WEU Ministerial Council, the text of which is published in EUROPE/Documents No 1478 which we have just sent out), the platform deals "with European security interests." The title alone gives an idea of the miracles of balance the diplomats had to perform to obtain the seven signatures. More precisely, and contrary to what some would have us believe, this text is not a formal commitment, but a point of departure and more exactly the enumeration of a series of notes (on the present conditions), criteria, principles and intentions which could be the basis for an "eventual" future action the decision on which, however, as well as its establishment, will depend on the will of the actors and the circumstances. This is obviously an aleatory outcome, even though this basis, or "platform" was carefully studied, in order to please everyone.

It is significant that, apart from the traditional confirmation of the "attachment of our countries to the principles upon which our democracies are based," the introduction recalls the commitment (which now dates from about twenty years ago) to build a European Union, and especially expresses the conviction that "the construction of an integrated Europe will remain incomplete as long as it does not include security and defence." This is a very remarkable passage, but it is rather perplexing. If this is only the expression of a "conviction", its value is only symbolic, and it has to be stacked along with the numerous verbal expressions which do nothing to change reality. If, on the other hand, these words are to be taken seriously, the question arises as to how one can imagine that a Treaty involving 7 of the 12 Members of the Community (i.e. a Europe which is integrated or is on the path to integration) can suddenly become "a major instrument" (as it says in point 3 of the introduction) in the achievement of the stated aim, i.e. the extension of economic integration to the area of policy and security. This question has no credible answer.

This said, most of the paragraphs included in the chapters which follow the introduction are overall perfectly acceptable, especially those where it says that the security of the Alliance is indivisible, that military security and a policy of détente are not contradictory, but complementary, and where the accent is put on Europe's vulnerability and the contribution it should make to its own defence apart from the impossibility of dis-associating arms control from a security policy.

Less overt reactions will doubtless be seen to the implicit or explicit acceptance of the policy of bilateral agreements and the maintenance in Europe of independent forces, nuclear or otherwise. In reality, all this is in contradiction with what one reads in the introduction on the subject of integration and which is repeated in the penultimate paragraph of this text. But there is a more fundamental remark to be made. How to translate the words expressed in this "platform" into concrete decisions and actions? In other words, what powers does the WEU have, the military competence of which was transferred right from the start to NATO (and the others to the Council of Europe)? Who is going to give a substance and a structure to this multi-form Europe, i.e. a Europe "with no form"? Who will govern it? Admittedly these are huge questions, to which we have no answer.

This does not prevent us from recognising the usefulness of a common exploratory job, one of mutual information, and especially of debate. Is it not also true that the central body of this organisation is still the Assembly, where the debate is wide and often animated, and is addressed to public opinion?

Emanuele Gazzo