

'European defence: a major step forward is taken' from the Tageblatt (2 March 2000)

Caption: On 2 March 2000, the Luxembourg daily newspaper Tageblatt announces that the interim Political and Security Committee of the European Union met the previous day for the first time in Brussels.

Source: Tageblatt. Escher Journal. 02.03.2000. Esch-sur-Alzette: Luxemburgs Genossenschaftsdruckerei. "Europe de la défense: une étape importante est franchie", p. 2.

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First meeting of the Political and Security Committee

European defence: a major step forward is taken

The European Union's Political and Security Committee (PSC), one of the three politico-military bodies set up by the Fifteen as part of the development of a European defence policy, met for the first time yesterday in Brussels.

The 15 representatives of the Member States in this new institution are 'pioneers', the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), Javier Solana, said in a statement.

'Much work remains to be done, but today we have taken an important and symbolic step forward,' he added.

The PSC consists of ambassadors, most of whom already represent their country in Western European Union (WEU), the European Union's military arm.

WEU, the only European organisation with responsibility for defence hitherto, but with no real power, will gradually hand over the reins to the EU, which decided at the Helsinki European Summit in December to take on new responsibilities in the security and defence field.

However, this inaugural meeting, held in the EU Council of Ministers' Justus Lipsius Building in Brussels, did not tackle any fundamental issues, according to one European diplomat who asked to remain anonymous.

The first working meeting of the PSC is scheduled for tomorrow, and it is likely to discuss the follow-up to the informal meeting of Defence Ministers held in Sintra, Portugal, on Monday, said a European official who declined to give his name. He added that the PSC will then meet every Friday.

The PSC, which is equivalent to NATO's North Atlantic Council (ambassadors), will operate for the time being as an interim body until permanent structures are set up, something which will require changes to the Treaty on European Union (Amsterdam Treaty).

The PSC is chaired by the representative of the country which holds the EU's rotating Presidency, currently Portugal, but the Fifteen have decided that this will not necessarily be the final decision.

Some countries, such as France and Germany, want the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, to chair the PSC in future. The PSC ambassadors will be joined next week by the military representatives of the Fifteen in the Military Committee and by the first military experts who are to form the nucleus of the future European Staff Headquarters, said Mr Solana. Most of the EU Member States have decided to appoint their current NATO military representative to the Military Committee. France has chosen otherwise, appointing an officer from Paris, General Jean-Paul Raffenne, formerly Deputy Chief of Defence Staff responsible for international relations, who served in Washington from 1994 to 1996. The team of military experts will consist of around a dozen officers and NCOs responsible for preparing the ground for the European Military Staff Headquarters, which is scheduled to be set up early in 2001.

The three interim bodies are initially to be accommodated in the EU Council of Ministers building in Brussels, but the Fifteen then want them to move to separate premises nearby.