

Operational role and crisis management

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Consultation in the event of a threat, conflict prevention and crisis management

When initiating action, Western European Union (WEU) would invoke Article VIII of the modified Brussels Treaty, which reads in part: ‘At the request of any of the High Contracting Parties the Council shall be immediately convened in order to permit Them to consult with regard to any situation which may constitute a threat to peace, in whatever area this threat should arise, or a danger to economic stability.’ Such consultation entailed diplomatic contacts between the national capitals as well as working meetings in the WEU Council and planning bodies, within the Atlantic Alliance and, after the Treaties of Maastricht and Amsterdam had been adopted, in the framework of relations between WEU and the EU (European Union).

WEU was rarely involved in Petersberg-type operations, however. When it was, it was a case of small-scale missions in terms of resources, though they were sometimes major from the point of view of their symbolic European value, with WEU cornered between, on the one hand, an Atlantic Alliance which was sometimes in competition with it in the theatres of operation and, on the other, the rivalries between certain Member States. These tensions would lead either to WEU being overlooked, or to its taking action under its own emblem but at the expense of catering to the lowest common denominator, or to paralysis (as happened in Vukovar in 1991 over Croatia, in Rwanda in 1996 over the African Great Lakes question, and in Albania in 1997).

Several small missions were, nevertheless, undertaken. There were the **joint actions** in the Persian Gulf between 1987 and 1990: Operation Cleansweep to clear mines from a sea-lane starting from the Straits of Hormuz, and the coordinating of naval operations during the 1990 Gulf War to impose an embargo on cargo shipments. During the Yugoslav conflict from 1992 to 1996, WEU carried out the Sharp Vigilance and Sharp Fence missions in the Adriatic in 1992, followed a year later by the Sharp Guard mission in coordination with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). The object was to enforce the United Nations embargo on the former Yugoslavia. Similarly, WEU ministers gave assistance (with policing and customs operations) to three countries on the Danube (Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania) to enforce the embargo on trade by way of the river. A police contingent was seconded to the municipality of Mostar, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, from 1994 to 1996, on behalf of the EU, with WEU acting as the EU’s ‘defence arm’ in the spirit of the Treaty of Maastricht.

A number of other operations were carried out for **crisis management** purposes between 1997 and 2001. The WEU mission to Albania involved sending a Multinational Advisory Police Element (MAPE) there. Its function was to advise the Albanian government on restructuring its police force and to train instructors. The mission was expanded at the EU’s request in February 1999 so as to widen its geographical area of operation and expand the ministries concerned, while at the same time playing an important part in managing refugees from Kosovo. The WEU Demining Assistance Mission to Croatia (WEUDAM) was also undertaken in accordance with the EU Treaty. The first of these missions, to Albania, was completed on 31 May 2001, while the Croatia mission came to an end on 30 November 2001. Lastly, from November 1998, under Article J.4(2) of the Treaty of Maastricht, the Torrejón Satellite Centre established by WEU supplied know-how in overall security surveillance in Kosovo for the EU, NATO and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE); from July of the following year, it focused on drawing up a digital map of the area concerned as a contribution to reconstruction aid.

All in all, the end results of WEU participation in managing the conflict in Yugoslavia, non-involvement in the African crises and in Operation Alba ⁽¹⁾ (which was left to a coalition centred on Italy, the framework nation), and a contribution which was often confined purely to policing, confirmed the lessons of the Gulf War. WEU was usually left out of the political process of peacemaking and of military operations involving peacekeeping. Its involvement was limited to enforcement measures by sea or river; it was not involved at all in land or airborne operations and it had difficulty coordinating modest police and customs operations.

In fact, if an operation proved to be small-scale, countries could disregard WEU procedures and work in an ad hoc framework, as they did with Operation Alba. If an operation was connected to a major crisis, NATO was then involved because it directly affected the security of the Member States. Between these two different views, there were intermediate missions where there could be competition between WEU and an ad hoc coalition of NATO and countries belonging to the Partnership for Peace ⁽²⁾, which already had useful

experience of peacekeeping operations.

As regards missions to rescue nationals (although they came under the heading of the Petersberg tasks), European States preferred to work ‘nationally’, with minimal coordination with the other allies (Albania in 1997, Sierra Leone in 1997, Brazzaville in 1997 and Kinshasa in 1997), rather than organising a WEU operation involving all ten Member States. Despite the mandate WEU had for monitoring the situation in Albania and the African Great Lakes region, the generic planning group ⁽³⁾ was never officially ordered to expand missions of that kind, notwithstanding assistance provided by data from the Situation Centre and, in particular, by the various national capitals.

There have, however, been some WEU missions which can be seen as equivalent to attempts to limit the spread of crises. When it comes to **conflict prevention**, WEU has played a special role, be it in arms control (ACA) ⁽⁴⁾, compliance by the Federal Republic of Germany with its own commitments, or projects carried out via its group of experts in CFE (conventional forces in Europe) verification and its Open Skies Group in setting up teams of inspectors.

WEU’s openings to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEEC) via the ‘consultation forum’ in May 1993, the Kirchberg Declaration of May 1994 and the defining of different, and evolving, categories of membership in the WEU Parliamentary Assembly can be seen as ways of bringing the various countries applying to join the EU closer together (within WEU and NATO). These moves can also be interpreted as ways of encouraging greater political and diplomatic interaction in the interests of promoting democratic principles and confidence-building measures. Interaction of this kind also served a policy aimed at bringing about peaceful settlement of differences involving a number of parties (such as the border problems between Italy and Slovenia and the Hungarian-Slovak dispute over the Danube barrage).

WEU also set up an Institute for Security Studies in Paris which carried out missions to provide decision-making assistance and establish contacts with researchers and institutes all over Europe as part of a cooperative approach over an extensive geographical area. In that context, the spirit of cooperation and dispute prevention found among decision-makers and opinion-leaders could be regarded as being, in a secondary sense, equivalent to preventive diplomacy.

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(1) A multinational protection force responsible for ensuring safe and rapid food aid distribution in Albania in 1997 (WEU Assembly, *The European Union in the Balkans: Althea and other operations*, report submitted on behalf of the Defence Committee by João Mota Amaral, document A/1919, Paris, 7 December 2005, http://www.assembly-weu.org/en/documents/sessions_ordinaires/rpt/2005/1919.pdf).

(2) A bilateral structure for association and cooperation between NATO and a partner State (often a future applicant for membership of the Alliance), as a means of setting up technical, military and political cooperation in the field of security and defence.

(3) Plans for force deployment planning according to predetermined scenarios covering the whole range of the Petersberg tasks. These generic schemes were updated, put into practice and carried out when there was a political decision to commit forces in the field.

(4) Agency for the Control of Armaments