

Interview with Charles Goerens in El País (13 September 1988)

Caption: On 13 September 1988, Charles Goerens, President of the Assembly of Western European Union (WEU), grants an interview to the Spanish daily newspaper El País in which he emphasises the importance of Spain's accession to WEU and discusses the reforms under way within the organisation.

Source: El País. 13.09.1988. Madrid. "Goerens: Los países de la UEO deben defender a sus aliados en sus fronteras", auteur:Ortega, Andrés.

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Goerens: ‘WEU countries must defend their allies at their borders’

The President of the Assembly of Western European Union supports Spanish accession in Madrid

ANDRÉS ORTEGA, Madrid

Charles Goerens, President of the Assembly of Western European Union (WEU), arrived in Madrid yesterday to express his public support for the work Spain has done for European integration, and to show the Assembly’s support for Spanish accession to WEU. For Goerens, WEU represents its member countries’ commitment to defend their allies at their borders, an issue that Spain must address, and which is currently being negotiated.

The 36-year-old Goerens, a liberal from Luxembourg in his second term of office, is the youngest president in the recent history of European parliamentary assemblies. He arrived in Madrid yesterday at the invitation of the Speaker of Congress, Félix Pons, and will attend several high-level meetings between today and tomorrow. Although negotiations are ongoing, Goerens estimates that Spain will have 12 seats in the 108-member Assembly of an enlarged WEU.

Question. WEU reform is under discussion. What will this reform or reorganisation entail?

Answer. Many decisions have yet to be taken, particularly as regards the necessary reorganisation of WEU, the missions for which it is responsible, and its intergovernmental activity in connection with disarmament and the strategy of the Atlantic Alliance. Until these issues have been resolved, the ambition of forming a European pillar in the Atlantic Alliance will continue to be a very vague formula.

The process of reactivating Western European Union began four years ago and is far from reaching a conclusion, to the point where many people still question the true extent of what has been achieved (...).

Q. Do you think the enlargement of WEU to Spain and Portugal will come into effect before that reform?

A. Spain is not being asked to join a closed organisation whose practices have been fossilised by 34 years of history. On the contrary, it is joining at a time when new intergovernmental activity is being developed and when its structures are adapting to unprecedented circumstances. This will allow Spain and Portugal to express their views on every issue that relates to WEU activity, and to play a full part in formulating the new structures.

Principles and realities

Q. Do you envisage any problems in Spain joining?

A. We’ll have to wait for negotiations to resume on 16 September to see how far both countries [Spain and Portugal] are prepared to observe the principles they have endorsed, which are set out in the Modified Brussels Treaty and the Hague Platform [of October 1987].

Q. What does that mean in practice?

A. The application of the Platform concerns the way in which each country is prepared to defend the other Member States at their borders. This is the mutual assistance clause that obliges each Member State to provide assistance to others in the event of a conflict.

Q. Does this mean that Spain must be militarily prepared to intervene at the borders of other countries?

A. It is the [WEU] Council [of Ministers] that will have to define the response in negotiations with the new member countries.

Q. Does Spain's nuclear stance raise problems?

A. In terms of principles, I don't think so, since the nuclear component is an essential aspect of the Hague Platform. And in so far as Spain and Portugal fully and unreservedly endorse that Platform, I don't see any difficulties of principle.

Q. And again, what does that mean in practice?

A. The negotiations on the enlargement [of WEU] and on the application of the Hague Platform should provide the practical answers. The Assembly is monitoring them closely.

Q. What does WEU expect of Spain?

A. We've been seeking this enlargement since 1984, and we firmly believe that it will enrich the European Community, which Spain has been heavily involved in building, and future WEU policy, which complements Community action.

Q. What would you think if Spain abandoned the EFA project, the future European fighter aircraft, and went for the French Rafale instead?

A. Spain has its independence in that area, and I won't try to impose a personal point of view. But I believe that in general the best way of keeping defence costs within acceptable limits is through closer cooperation in the field of research and arms production (...).