


# Spain’s accession to WEU

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Western European Union (WEU) is a Europe-based defence organisation whose origin lies in the Treaty on Economic, Social and Cultural Collaboration and Collective Self-Defence signed at Brussels on 17 March 1948 by the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. Its main objective was automatic mutual defence in the event that one of its members was attacked by a non-Treaty State. On 4 April 1949 the signatories of the Treaty of Brussels signed the North Atlantic Treaty in Washington alongside other European nations, the United States and Canada, resulting in the establishment of NATO. Some years later, on 23 October 1954, the Paris Protocol modifying the Treaty of Brussels was signed, establishing the Western European Union and providing for the Federal Republic of Germany and Italy to accede to the Brussels Treaty of 1948. It should be noted that since the establishment of the Atlantic Alliance WEU had become a second-tier structure in so far as European security was concerned, although despite that fact, WEU was regarded as a clear example of European integration.

In view of its decision to participate in all Western defence organisations, Spain decided to join WEU. Steps to that end were taken by the Socialist Government of Felipe González who, in the 'Decalogue on peace and security policy' presented during the Debate on the State of the Nation, which ran from 23 to 25 October 1984, set out Spain's intention to join WEU in the conviction that membership of the organisation was fully compatible with the foreign policy that the government sought to conduct.

Later Madrid argued that WEU had to be revitalised to strengthen the 'European pillar' of the Atlantic Alliance and reinforce the European Communities by making WEU a tool to complement both bodies. That idea became a reality with the signing of the Single European Act in 1986, and WEU was fully incorporated into the Community integration process in October 1987 with the adoption in The Hague of the Platform on European Security Interests, under which WEU was relaunched as the European component of NATO.

The Socialist Government's pro-European stance on defence matters had strong support among the Spanish public. That stance was a particularly important factor in convincing Spanish public opinion of the appropriateness of joining WEU, especially in view of the fact that Article 4 of the Brussels Treaty was even stricter in respect of collective security than Article 5 of the Washington Treaty: it placed all WEU member States under an obligation to afford 'all the military and other aid and assistance in their power' to the allied country which had come under armed attack.

Once Spain confirmed in 1986 that it would continue to be a member of NATO, the WEU Council of Ministers agreed in April 1988 to the requests of Felipe González's Government to open negotiations with Madrid which would lead to Spain's becoming a full member of WEU. The following month saw the commencement in London (the United Kingdom held the rotating Presidency) of talks to that end, where there was discussion of the absence of protection for the Canary Islands, Ceuta and Melilla: the Brussels Treaty only protected the territory of the European continent. Other matters of discussion were the de-nuclearisation of Europe, the adoption by Madrid of the Hague Platform and the handling of the Gibraltar dispute.

Finally, once all those hurdles had been overcome and the Madrid Government undertook to accept both the Brussels Treaty and the Platform on European Security Interests unconditionally, Spain, and indeed Portugal, joined WEU on 14 November 1988. In so doing, Spain demonstrated its intention to contribute to the growth and consolidation of a common European defence. In fact, the meeting of the Political Committee of the WEU Parliamentary Assembly subsequently held in Madrid in March 1991 highlighted the cooperation afforded by Spain in the political and military activities conducted in the framework of the organisation.

The entry into WEU marked the attainment of a goal set by Spain when it joined NATO, namely, a greater commitment to the Western defence system, a commitment which was consistent with its support for a truly

European defence and security policy, although the latter would only be achieved years later.